

MORAL INJURY:
CARING FOR WOUNDED SOULS WITH INVISIBLE WOUNDS

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	v
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	23
3. LITERATURE REVIEW	45
4. PROJECT DESIGN	70
5. OUTCOMES	99
BIBLIOGRAPHY	116
VITA	121

ABSTRACT

Many of America's military veterans who have served in conflicts such as the Vietnam War, The Gulf War, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) have suffered what are considered invisible wounds within their souls known as Moral Injury. MI can be characterized as feelings of betrayal, loss of innocence, and wounded conscience that results from the inability to reconcile one's perceived values about the world with what they saw or were ordered to do in a combat setting. The intent of this project is to educate the church about what MI is and how the church can support and minister to veterans who want God to be their source of healing and restoration.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

My government spent over \$50,000 and many months to train me for Vietnam, but not a penny or a day to help me come home. How was I supposed to act civilized after being trained to beat and brutalize and then use that training against Americans?¹

--Doug, U.S. Army, Military Police

Introduction

Moral Injury (MI) is an emerging issue that could move closer to the forefront of both current military and veteran care. Countless military members and veterans have come home from America's wars to a society that no longer feels home to them. They came from communities around the country to join the military ranks. They were transformed into combat machines, issued licenses to kill on behalf of our nation, and sent to fight enemies in foreign lands. Most who joined the military brought with them a foundation of values and basic principles of decency and respect for human life.

However, many have reported they feel they have lost their souls and their humanity following exposure to the traumatic realities of combat, being forced to carry out orders to kill, and witnessing inhumane and criminal practices carried out by members wearing the same uniform. They don't know how to reconcile their value system and conscience with what they did or what they saw "over there." They were

¹ Tick Edward, *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005), 83.

sent to war being the person they knew themselves to be, only to come home not knowing who they are, anymore. In fact, many have radically changed into people neither they, nor anyone else, know.

Countless military members have brought home invisible wounds, better known as *Moral injury*. Moral injury (MI) is a wound that damages the soul of a person in traumatic fashion and creates wounds that may never heal. Over the past few decades, from Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan, countless veterans have developed a very common disorder called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). However, nested alongside that condition is this lesser-known Moral Injury. The pages that follow explain what MI is.

A big concern of mine is that not many people in the Christian community know much at all about MI. Which leads me to an even larger concern that churches and congregations across the country have current military members and veterans attending who suffer from MI, but neither they nor anyone in their home churches may even know it, much less how to deal with it. Furthermore, it is disconcerting that many veterans leave the military and re-enter society who have MI and may quickly feel a void in their lives that no one may be able to fill.

Upon consideration, it became clear that “the church” in American society has a tremendous opportunity to reach out to those who enter their doors searching for meaning, who are dealing with wounds they may not know they have, and who are struggling to heal from them. Churches can offer a form of deep healing that the world cannot. While the church cannot necessarily address or resolve needs that can only be

met through professional therapy, it is a place where many seek to find solace, peace, perspective, and most of all, to connect with God. Many are loaded down with self-contempt and self-condemnation. They are unable to forgive themselves and others whom they feel have violated their moral code and their sense of right and wrong.

The questions that came out of the reflections on this research are important to address. How might the Christian community help support these men and women whose souls, and sense of morality and humanity, have been traumatically wounded? How can the church help them connect with God in such a way that they can begin a process of recovery and healing? How can caregivers, lay ministers, and everyday fellow believers, who may intersect with these folks in daily life, facilitate and become a part of the healing process to help them reconcile with their wounds, with those who wounded them, with themselves, and ultimately with God? Soul care is at the heart of what God has called his people to offer to one another. Moral Injury requires soul care and soul repair, and the body of Christ is an important vessel to help facilitate that care to broken souls wanting healing and restoration.

Purpose

This project has three goals. The first goal is raise knowledge and awareness of Moral Injury within the Christian community by explaining what MI is. The second goal is to invite the Christian community such as caregivers, lay ministers, and Christians who feel called and perhaps a burden to minister to get directly involved with these men and women. What might the outcome be if the Christian community took a broader and

more direct approach to seek out this hurting demographic who are within their reach and scope of impact in order to walk with them and to support them in a way that fosters soul care? God designed the church to be a conduit of healing and restoration. A place is needed where the military member can deconstruct the processes that created their MI in order to construct a new sense of purpose and meaning for their lives.

This leads to the third goal in that this project is to be a voice that calls out to Christians to join together to contact and to journey with wounded souls in such a way that helps to spark and facilitate a process of healing within the soul. This can happen as a result of educating and inviting the Christian community to put their arms around these men and women in a way that sends the message, “I care. How can I help?”

What Is Moral Injury

Moral Injury is defined several ways within the clinical realm and is just now becoming better known in clinical studies. In this author’s collaborative research on this issue, the essence of MI is a deep violation of one’s moral code or construct as a human being. It is the virtual shredding or stripping away of one’s humanity and the destruction of deeply held beliefs about what is right and wrong. It can occur when one is forced to commit acts or forced to witness acts that fundamentally violate and traumatically wound the core of human conscience.

In addition, MI is the moral dissonance between one’s idealized values and their true experience. As a result, the wound numbs the soul and damages one’s ability to reconnect with life. MI begins in the conscience and grows out of the reasoning process

into a fractured state of morality. Moral dissonance impacts the process of moral development, impairs moral judgment, and weakens the ability to reconcile. The level of severity within the dissonance becomes the vehicle by which moral injury affects veterans for a lifetime. The dissonance affects people in various ways, such as not being able to participate in simple events, and can limit their ability to cope and manage themselves.

Furthermore, too much stimuli can hamper one's ability to be in public for any length of time, such as not being able to go to a shopping mall due to the large crowds, or even the grocery store. This condition creates challenges that are unique and difficult for others who don't understand MI. It is common for many to reach a point where they feel like a social misfit or reject, whom others will think of as weird and abnormal and someone to avoid. It is a difficult road for them to walk, with typically few who are able to understand and willing to help them.

Moral Injury and PTSD

To state succinctly, MI is not PTSD, nor a hybrid version of it. In actuality, the condition has been around for centuries, it just hasn't been called what it is now. While the term is fairly new within military and civilian clinical communities, it is a separate and distinct condition from PTSD. At this time, no definitive studies have quantified the number of service members and families who are affected by Moral Injury.

However, a number of recent studies do account for a numerical sum of troops who have experienced combat stress, with future development of PTSD. Post-Traumatic

Stress Disorder is a trauma-related injury commonly diagnosed from significant combat stress related events. Moral Injury comes into play when a Soldier reports that he feels he has lost his moral compass and no longer has the ability to feel any sense of right and wrong. He feels as if his humanity has been dulled to the point where he feels less human and more a subject worthy of punishment due to the guilt they ascribe to themselves as a result of their combat experience.

MI may not manifest itself in the same way or fashion one expects from PTSD. According to the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study, (NVVRS) almost 36 percent of male veterans met the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders- III (DSM-III) criteria for PTSD, with 70 percent surveyed experiencing at least one of the symptoms.² This was nearly thirty times the rate of civilians diagnosed with PTSD. Therefore, it is very telling that the higher veteran rates can be associated with the level of combat exposure frequency of triggering events in combat.³

Those with PTSD commonly feel anxiety and fear, causing many to worry that fear may take over their lives. As a result, many attempt suicide as a way of escape from the constant weight of anxiety and worry. In contrast, those suffering from MI essentially struggle mostly with a sense of loss and an inability to reconcile the moral

² Jennifer L. Price, "Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy," *Clinical Psychology Review* 29 (2009), 695-706.

³ Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1994), 168, 300.

confusion they feel with the world they no longer feel they know.⁴ Trust has been destroyed, and they now look at the world as a foreign planet from which they wish they could escape. What truly makes MI different from PTSD is that veterans who suffer from MI have come home from war and they can neither forgive themselves nor others for what they saw and did in combat. MI isn't about medications or engaging in the type of therapies that a PTSD patient might undergo. This is a deep laceration of the soul, if you will, that is often hidden and invisible; it is not behaviorally manifested in the way PTSD can be. It is a wound that medicine cannot necessarily heal. It requires a different type of healing than one might seek with PTSD.

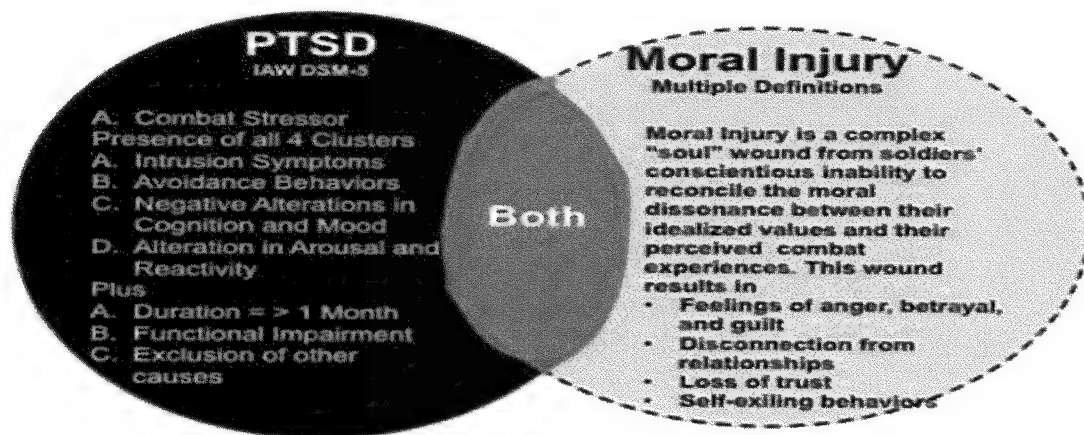


Figure 1.1 PTSD and Moral Injury Side By Side. Source: http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/PTSDoverview/dsm5_criteria_ptsd.asp.

⁴ Susan Kaplan, "The Military Is Going Beyond PTSD to Help Soldiers Who Have Suffered a 'Moral Injury,'" posted December 27, 2013, accessed June 20, 2015, <http://www.pri.org/stories/2013-12-27/military-goingbeyond-ptsd-help-soldiers-who-have-suffered-moral-injury>.

The DSM-V defines PTSD as a disorder from exposure to literal or imminent death that causes significant trauma. Statistics show that nearly 19 percent of service members deployed to war since 2001 manifested symptoms of PTSD, as defined by DSM-V.⁵ This leads to the impairment of an individual's ability to engage socially.⁶ Psychiatrist Jonathan Shay, in his work with combat veterans over the past few decades, has commonly seen in his practice many of those who have returned from war who possessed more of a perception or interpretation about their combat experiences than what they actually saw. He found that this is what most contributed to their PTSD, and again, not necessarily the actual events themselves.

Army Lieutenant Colonel Douglas Pryer portrayed a clear distinction between MI and PTSD:

PTSD is physical in origin, while moral injury is a dimensional problem. Physically stressful experiences may cause PTSD, but nonthreatening events may still serve as a source of moral trauma. Moral injury is real and any nation that desires to truly honor its warriors must place perceptions of "what is right" at the forefront of its deliberations on when and how to wage war....Some leaders...can and do protest that moral injury cannot possibly apply to U.S. service members. Despite their protests, large numbers of troops clearly believe they did or witnessed something wrong downrange, perhaps terribly wrong, and what matters here is how the individuals judge their experiences, not what other say.⁷

⁵ Terri Tanielian, "Exposure and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders in Troops and Estimating the Costs to Society: Implications from the RAND Invisible Wounds of War Study," accessed March 17, 2016, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/2009/RAND_CT321.pdf.

⁶ Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Version 5. American Psychiatric Association, accessed May 18, 2013, <http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/PTSD%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>.

⁷ Douglas A. Pryer, "Moral Injury: What Leaders Don't Mention When They Talk of War," *Army* September 2014: 34-36.

Charles Figley and Bill Nash also provided an insightful perspective on this matter:

The more that is learned about the full nature of these injuries [traumatic stress], the less room there remains for narrow, reductionist models to explain them. Multidimensional, integrated theories require testing with multidimensional research that seeks to uncover not only individual cause effect relationships but the interplay between multiple causes and effects at the levels of brain, mind, and society.⁸

Moral Dissonance

Moral dissonance happens as a result of someone trying to reconcile certain events or realities that they have experienced in a combat zone with their inherent value system prior to that experience that shook the foundation of their belief system. From a holistic perspective, it is difficult for the person to overcome his dissonance because the wound he feels in his soul and conscience is so real to him that every part of his being feels different. In addition, he often grapples with so many aspects of his experience that he tends to fail to make sense out her experience. Hence, the common end result leads to disrupted lives and conflicting ideals, which promote what is the sense of moral dissonance that he cannot overcome. This leads to a shattered identity, then leading to patterns of destructive behavior, triggered by frustration and anger over a condition and reality he can neither understand nor control for himself.

⁸ Charles Figley and William Nash, *Combat Stress Injury: Theory, Research, and Management* (New York, NY: Taylor and Francis, 2011), 89.

Those who enter into military service bring with them a conscience that is partially shaped by pre-existing values that may or may not support the realities of combat and war into which their country sends them. In the recent wars fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, droves of people in society objected to the conflicts out of a belief that our involvement was wrong. This is the message troops heard while they served in those combat areas. Naturally, this could lead many of them to question the validity and justification for what they were there to do and whether their actions were moral.

Miki Kashtan writing about moral dissonance stated that a segment of society believes in the necessity for war on the ground of protecting human freedom, delivering innocents from oppression. They feel that military service is a way of being part of an engine equipped to carry out good and to restore a sense of goodness in the world by defeating tyrannical opposition to the common good of society and humanity.⁹ Hence, the high risk that comes with joining the military and potentially losing one's life is viewed as a sense of honor because of the moral justification. Therefore, to die for one's country is to have died for the greater cause of good. This seems to come down to the ideals of the person, his character, and his belief in preserving the greater good of mankind, and risking death is worth it in order to deliver the oppressed from tyranny.

⁹ Miki Kashtan, October 7, 2014, "Moral Dissonance," *Psychology Today*, posted July 27, 2013, accessed October 7, 2014, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/acquired-spontaneity/201307/moral-dissonance>.

In previous wars, namely Vietnam, our government declared a draft, which contained a mix of both conscientious objectors and acceptors. One may assume an all-volunteer military would be full of primarily conscientious acceptors. That is not necessarily the case; the pure numbers of cases of MI where one's understanding of right and wrong has been violated, and the grief, numbness, or guilt that follows is clearly evident. The moral dissonance wedged in the midst of it cannot be ignored. This means that while one may have entered into military service as a conscientious acceptor, they could end up a conscientious objector due to the moral injury inflicted by the often confusing and blurred lines of morality that have been compromised within their value system.¹⁰ The guilt that often accompanies moral dissonance leads to altered decision-making and the creation of self-condemnation and judgment.

The Ministry Of Soul Care

So, considering what is at stake, what is the answer for MI? I believe that soul care is the direction to pursue. Again, the primary purpose in writing this paper is to raise awareness and knowledge on what is an emerging issue that may be expected to become more prominent within the focus of veteran care. It is possible that MI may become its own separate lens through which the optics of clinical care are viewed.

One of chief concern about this topic is that MI it is not widely known or understood adequately enough. It could easily be mistaken for PTSD. To clarify again, MI

¹⁰ Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini, *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War* (New York, NY: Random House, 2012).

is not PTSD, nor is PTSD MI. Leading experts and authors on this issue, such as Rita Nakashima Brock, Gabriella Lettini, Jonathan Shay and Edward Tick, have made this clear in their research studies and clinical practice.¹¹

Another concept this author wants to submit to the Christian community is the need for soul care to provide for our current military members and veterans. Therefore, the recommended way for churches to begin is to identify who are their veterans, Active duty, Reservist and National Guard service members in their congregations. Second, the church should reach out to these the veterans and ask how the church could best minister to them.

Third, the church should explore if there is enough of a need, or level of interest, to implement a fellowship and support group for military personnel that could invite discussion and dialogue about issues like Moral Injury. Encouraging pastors and elders to take a good look at what needs might exist and to determine if there is enough interest to form a support group is a good place to start helping soldiers. A Christ-centered, Bible-based focus towards healing and recovery for folks who have been to war and who may have not begun to process their experience is needed

Several potential dilemmas exist in trying flesh out this vision for seeing the church become a larger agent of veteran support. First, most churches are designed to execute programs, and this author sees a different approach needed to support veterans with MI. These folks do not often connect with church programs as way of

¹¹Author's research conclusions with elements from Jonathan Shay, Edward Tick, Rita Nakashima-Brock, Gabriella Lettini.

trying to heal. Rather, the focus needs to be on simply connecting and bringing these folks together with one another in sort of an off the grid way, if you will. Nominate a pastor, elder, or lay leader to be a mentor or spiritual director who can facilitate discussion and provide an organized structure for group work. The goal is to bring veterans and current service members together to commit to such a group where they could have a sacred place and a confidential setting where they share their experience, process, pray, study, cry, heal, and recover together in such a way as to nurture relationships with one another.

The local church can help facilitate soul care with these men and women in this way, but church leadership needs to completely support it. It needs to be understood that the nature of healing these folks require is not going to be accomplished in 10 to 13 weeks of intensive work, or by any one thing in particular. Rather, this soul care may require a comprehensive process of mind, body, and soul resources that may also require outside clinical treatment, and various other resources, to help augment the process God can and will use to help them reach the place in their life that they want to reach.

Larry Crabb highlights an important point about soul care that is relevant to how the church can support those suffering from MI in his book, *The Pressure's Off*.¹² The church should be a hospital not just for sinners, but for those who do not want to feel the pressure to conform their behavior to a set of rules. Rather, they want to be in an

¹² Larry Crabb, *The Pressure's Off: Breaking Free from Rules and Performance*, 2nd ed (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2012).

environment of grace, mercy, and compassion. For example, lawyers re-enforce the presence of policies and rules, while chaplains are called upon to support the commander's message to soldiers about doing the right thing, such as not abusing their loved ones engaging in activities that will get them thrown into jail.

The message this group needs to hear is that there is a place to heal, away from a set of rules they probably don't believe in anymore because the MI shattered their view of authority. In addition, they do not need someone pushing ethics down their throat, given that the very nature of MI is a violation of their ethical system. Therefore, the heart of soul care begins with the gospel of Christ and the centrality of the Cross. They need to hear that God loves them and he has not given up on them. They also need to hear that through the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit that it is possible to forgive themselves and others.

Potential challenges to this do have to be considered. First, not every church is going to be conducive for what some of our military members and veterans need. The church in America, and its respective denominations, maintain wide varying perceptions about war. Some denominations are best described as conscientious objectors who oppose the Just War Theory. Others are conscientious acceptors and support the Just War Theory. This can create problems, but it can also create opportunities. While one may not believe in the war a soldier was ordered to fight in, they can still support the soldier and love and care for him or her as a fellow believer. There are also varying cultural mindsets and long standing belief systems.

A potential roadblock for a MI veteran could be seeing an American flag placed near the pulpit. While most people wouldn't think anything of it, and probably don't even pay any attention to it, a veteran might, and their perception could be very different than everyone else around them. While most probably view the flag as representing patriotism and a symbol of those who have fought to protect our freedom, a soldier who has returned home may be questioning everything they thought they knew and once believed in. Now, they may view the flag as a symbol of betrayal of the values they were led to believe were important and worth dying for. They may perceive a message that says that patriotism, being an American and a Christian are all one and the same.

Again, this raises the chief concern of this project, that there are many people who do not know what Moral Injury is, its dynamics, nor how to differentiate it from PTSD. I fear that a veteran may be shunned for being perceived as being anti-American because of thoughts, views, and feelings they express about the country they now feel has betrayed them, lied to them, and now may abandon them for having attitudes and feelings that are not socially acceptable.

When some of these men and women signed up for military service it may have been out of a sense of duty and honor. Some may have joined because of their family heritage of past relatives who served. Still others may have joined as a way of trying to better their lives by launching out on their own. They went to the desert in Iraq or Afghanistan and experienced things that not only changed them as people, but also changed their views and their feelings about humanity. The experience created invisible wounds that caused a major shift in their thinking of how they view life, their country,

their superior officers, authority, government, society, and the world. The lens through which they now see is completely different than the one they looked through before they went into a combat zone. For many, it took away their innocence and destroyed their idealized views and beliefs they held until they came face to face with the harsh realities of war that changed it all. It is the author's view that the culture of America is built upon an idealized way of life. In *The Road to Character*, David Brooks discussed the shifts that have taken place in society over the past decades.¹³ He highlighted the World War II generation that came home and simply integrated back into society and moved on with life, job, and family. It was common that the wounds of war were never dealt with, much less talked about, in any forum in society. Outward expression of anger, resentment, hurt, betrayal, violation of conscience - hence MI - was not something to be found or broached in that day. Feelings were commonly repressed, and the only acceptable stories to be told to the public eye were of heroism and sacrificial service.

When a soldier came home and his family asked him what it was like, and he told them, the soldier was often told to never speak of it again. So, the topic was dropped and never addressed. Hence, the soldier was left to suffer alone in silence with no one to talk to about their war experience, and with no programs in place at the VA to help them with their Moral Injury and PTSD.

Fast forward to the Vietnam War, and we saw a dramatic shift in the way the public responded to our returning military, which erupted into major problems for

¹³ David Brooks, *The Road To Character* (New York, NY: Random House, 2015).

veterans who, to this day, have yet to recover or heal. Brooks put in perspective an important point in that how our society views its wars is how they are likely going to treat its veterans. Hence, there are several generations of veterans who have fought in our nation's wars of whom one could only imagine a fair amount have carried Moral Injury with them for years and years, with no one to hear their story and no soul care beyond a Sunday sermon. Our American culture and society have failed these men and women miserably on many different levels. Yet, the church can help, and God can work in the lives of these broken servicemen in a way that will initiate a process of healing for them.

The Church and Moral Injury

This author believes there are three key areas that are very important in terms of how the church can help make a difference in the lives of wounded souls. The first is Moral Reconciliation. Reconciliation is one of the first areas to address for a soldier who has returned from war with his ideals about humanity shattered and his sense of right and wrong so terribly skewed by acts he was ordered to commit, or forced to witness, in combat. This person needs to come to terms with what has wounded him, and to deal with the pain, the numb feelings, the emotions, the confusion, and the sense of betrayal and violation of the shredding of their value system.

The process of learning how to forgive themselves and others may be the most difficult place to work through. How does one forgive someone who committed what they perceived as inhumane, criminal, unethical, and ruthless acts towards another

human being? How does a soldier forgive himself for his participation in acts for which he now despises himself? These are some of the hard questions that need clear answers. This is why the church needs to be involved in the soul care of these wounded soldiers.

There are wounds that God alone can heal. While God uses empirical medicine and scientific means to facilitate healing, there are those hidden places in the soul that only the Holy Spirit can truly see and properly heal. The process of reconciliation can take a lifetime for some, and those people will need the support of many who are able to be patient and understanding of the struggle involved with that process. The grace of God is able to touch any life, no matter how badly wounded she may be. No one who has the Spirit of God in his life, even in a minimal way, is beyond the grip of God's grace to touch his life to heal, to help him to forgive, and to help him reconcile with the things that broke him.

The second key area in which the church can minister to people with MI is Moral Development. The church needs to understand that it may be easy for someone whose system of ethics and values have been destroyed to rationalize any behavior, dismissing and not caring whether it is right or wrong. A church can help wounded soldiers with moral development by slowly and graciously taking them to the Bible to see, not a set of rules to which they need to adhere, but to see a God who loves them and is able to provide the stability they need to rebuild their lives. Through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, God is more than able to perform a good work in the heart and soul of a broken man and woman to restore them. The outflow of this work is a life that is

conformed into the image of Christ through spiritual formation. The desired outcome is not good moral people; rather, people who are growing in their relationship with Christ, resulting in them bearing the fruit of his handiwork in their lives.

The third important area in this process is Moral Judgment. When the first two previous steps are developed, a soldier who was once shattered and broken now has a restored sense of being able to feel again as a result of the Holy Spirit's work. He is able to see his moral compass through a clean lens. This speaks of discipleship and mentorship with the ability to continue the work of healing by processing the past to reach that place of healing. Imagine seeing a transformed life that is gradually becoming more and more conformed into the image and person Christ.

Imagine the growth that could occur through the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Imagine a broken man or woman becoming whole, perhaps for the first time in his or her life. This is why the Christian community is so vital to this process. It is God's tool to fulfill his kingdom purposes on earth through broken men and women who are no less loved and no less valuable, in spite of how they may see themselves due to the pain they bear from the wounds caused by war. To see the love, grace, and mercy of God touch lives is worth the work necessary to see the footprints of God around them, performing a profound work in those secret places only truly known to the Lord.

My Story

This is a difficult paper for me to write, which is the reason why I am doing it. I was an Army Chaplain for over nine years. I was deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan

during those years, and I saw what my VA psychiatrist recently told me were chronic levels of trauma. I am used to the focus of Moral Injury and PTSD mostly being placed on the combat soldier. However, I am here to say that caregivers like me were also greatly affected by what I saw, and what I dealt with, in taking care of those combat soldiers. I could spend pages describing the suicides and combat deaths, and the tremendous emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical toll it has taken on me. Suffice to say, I attribute the development to my own Moral Injury to what I now know to be excessive exposure to combat trauma and the raw nature of it and the cumulative toll it had on me from a human perspective. Hence, having seen and experienced so many traumatic events that I would characterize in terms of the images, smells, and overall carnage that I felt was literally shoved in my face over and over again caused me to question whether any of what we were doing was worth it and whether the cost even worth it, much less the human toll that resulted in what I knew was taking place. It simply became overwhelming and almost too much to absorb, although I somehow found a way to do so while I was deployed and never failed once to carry out my duties to the Soldiers who counted on me to provided spiritual care in their moments of crisis. It wasn't until after I got out of the Army that my body started to pay the price. I am now a disabled veteran and will deal with PTSD, an underactive thyroid, and Sleep Apnea for the rest of my life. Looking back, I now have a different perspective about the legitimacy and morality of the U.S involvement in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The essence of my MI is now the feelings that none of what we were doing in Iraq and Afghanistan was worth the price paid in terms of blood and treasure. I cannot reconcile for myself how any of it was

worth it, and having seen so many Soldiers lose their lives there just doesn't add up to me in terms of the overall mission that we were told to accomplish. What I saw instead was a political war fought on the backs of U.S troops. For that I cannot bridge the meaning between what was portrayed by our political leaders with what I saw on the ground.

I saw Moral Injury happen to people in combat theaters, and back at home as well. There was no escape from it, and no matter how much I wanted to get away from it at times, it either found me or I found it. Moral Injury was, and is, part of my story as I write this thesis. I helped many I know who had it, and in a way, I think I have it in my own way as a caregiver. I often questioned myself, and still do today, what it was all worth, why so many died, and for what reason? Why so many families had to lose their loved ones is a question I will never be able to answer.

Parts of my soul are now numb from having worn the realities of trauma on me for too long. I know that terrible things happen in war, and that death and life-altering or casualties come with the turf. I believe that sometimes war is necessary in order to defeat evil in the world, but it can never satisfy the painful cost required to do so. This is all part of what makes up my story, and why I am writing. Suffice to say, this is a topic that is deeply rooted in my personal experience, and it is a very real part of who I am now. I hope this paper will shed more light on this issue, so let's press on!

Project Goals

It is my hope that through this project I can bring awareness and knowledge to the Christian community about Moral Injury, because as I stated earlier, this is an emerging issue within the community of veterans across our country, and I firmly believe that it has been a part of the human experience from the very beginning of time. Therefore, I am going to take the reader back in time to where I believe MI has its roots in the Garden of Eden. Second, I am going to construct a biblical and theological framework around this issue by showing how God and MI intersect each other, along with principles that highlight the sources God offers to those who are wounded by MI. Third, I am going to profile three characters from the Scripture who endured great hardship, and examine and analyze how they and God engaged each other within the context of their experience. Fourth, I will examine the morality and nature of warfare within the context of the Bible, as it pertains to God's nature, character, and divine purposes. Fifth, I will present my project design tool on MI, in which I conducted several person to person research interviews with combat veterans, military chaplains, and civilian caregivers. Their perspectives will offer expertise to this issue that will truly bring the human element into the narrative of this project in a way that is real and powerful.

**Love your neighbor as yourself... remember your readers are your neighbors.
— David Currie, conversation at every orientation lunch—**

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Moral Injury: A Biblical Perspective

This chapter examines Moral Injury from a biblical and theological perspective by presenting principles that can provide insight into who God is for broken men and women who have returned from war. Wounded souls need many sources to help them process their injury.

Especially important is how to begin the reconciliation process between the experience that injured them and the reality in which they now live. For many, the hardest part of the injury is self-forgiveness. Understanding MI from this perspective can bring better understanding to the complicated issues that tend to accompany a veteran who may feel abandoned by everyone in their life, including God.

Ultimately, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to minister healing recovery in the lives of those who seek Him:

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.¹

¹ John 16:12-15. All Scripture citations are taken from the New International Version, 2010, unless otherwise noted.

Basic Principles

The first and most important principle is that God is our source of hope. Psalm 147:3 says that “God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds”. This verse describes characteristics that are often found among those who suffer from MI. In addition, this text depicts God as a healer and caregiver. So, it is important to help the wounded soldier understand that God heals, and he uses many means to administer healing and restoration, albeit emotional, mental, physical, spiritual, and relational.

A second principle is that God is our source of forgiveness and deliverance from self-condemnation. Genesis 4:2-13, Matthew 5:44, Romans 8:1, and I John 1:9 provide important insights about healing and the ways God chooses heal. Forgiveness is a key to healing and working through moral injury, whether it is forgiveness from God for sins committed, forgiveness of others who have sinned against the soldier, or forgiveness of oneself for perceived or real sins committed, along with the guilt that could hold some hostage.

A third principle to consider is that God is our source of grace and peace. I Timothy 1 and John 14 provide words of comfort and examples of the transformational work God can perform in lives. Letting go of “what is behind and straining towards what is ahead,” as Paul wrote in Philippians, are valuable words of wisdom that can be applied to the process of healing from traumatic experiences.

A fourth principle is that people matter to God. Jesus’ words in Luke 12:7 clearly shows that lives matter to God. No matter how broken or damaged we may become by life, we are valuable. Nothing done to us, nor any wrong we may feel we have

committed towards others, can nullify God's plan and purpose for our lives. It is very common for those suffering from moral injury to feel alone in their struggle, isolated from those they feel don't care about them, believing their lives hold little value in a society that does not seem to understand them. Yet, they are not alone, nor are they isolated; they have value because they matter to God.

The fifth principle is that God is present in our suffering.² He is able to redeem our lives in spite of our damaged past, and in spite of sins committed by us, against us by others, or against ourselves. God is our source of healing, and only in him can we truly find wholeness and the ability to recover from that which has broken us. Moses writes in Deuteronomy, "See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand."³

The sixth principle is that God suffers with us. In my experience as a chaplain, I have yet to run across anyone who has ever considered God in this way. Instead, most have said they feel God is distant, silent, detached, and indifferent towards their pain.

I have gotten mixed results when trying to show that God does care and that he suffers as a loving Father with his children. In these situations, I rely on the truth in John 16 that states that it is the role of the Spirit to work in the hearts and minds of people. In my years of working with wounded soldiers, I have always told them that I can walk

² Psalm 47:1.

³ Deuteronomy 32:39.

with them, but I cannot fix them or their problems. I state that God invites them to walk with him, but they have to choose whether or not they are willing to go to the places he wants to take them. For most, it is hard to envision anything beyond the moment or the short-term.

The steps they take tend to be small and sometimes retracted. So, the process requires a great deal of patience and understanding. However, without a genuine relationship with Christ and a solid grounding in Scripture, it is difficult for them to view God as one who loves and cares for them, when it may be God who they blame for everything that has gone wrong in their lives.

While this author believes that God can heal wounds, it should be understood that God may not choose to heal all or even some of those suffering from emotional, spiritual, mental, or physical ailments. Ultimately, a full transition of conformity into the image and likeness of Christ after this life will be evident upon entry into the bodily resurrection. Hence, expectations ought to be adjusted, and it should be understood that it is up to God how, if, when, or how much He chooses to heal.

This does not seem to be the focus of the biblical writers; rather, the focus appears to be on trusting in Christ who is our redeemer, healer, Savior, and constant companion through the journey. In spite of limitations, those who have hope in Christ can still find purpose, meaning, and fulfillment in the plan God has for them and glorify

Him through their life. We are loved by God and He wants to be glorified in our lives,⁴ leading to the seventh principle which is that God is our source of life and love.⁵

Finally, God is our source of healing and renewal. These are all sources God provides to us, and He is very involved, working His purposes in those who are wounded to recover and grow. Romans 8:38-39 states, “I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The Origin of Moral Injury

The origin of MI has its roots in Genesis 3. This narrative shows the transition that occurred once sin entered into the mix. The moral order God had set into place was corrupted, affecting everything in creation. This included the corruption of man in terms of mind, body, and soul. While I find several scenes taking place in this passage, what I find telling is what was set into motion once the act of disobedience happened. Hence, based on what took place, what changed between man and his relationship with God and the world around him? Illness and death are the two main outcomes of “the fall,” and these can be attributed to the development of MI, as this particular injury centers

⁴ Romans 8:38-39.

⁵ 1 John 4:19.

on the numbing of one's conscience and the distortion of one's moral compass and structure. Genesis 3:21-24 states:

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

In Genesis 3:21, God provides garments of skin, giving a first picture of sacrificial atonement and redemption. Although God clothed Adam and Eve, they were still banished from the Garden of Eden. They left innocence behind as they were thrust into a new world order where they would no longer have God's unconditional protection. They were now bound to the consequences of their own free will.

Upon examination of the Genesis 4 passage, one may ponder how Adam and Eve processed everything that happened within their marriage and family. It appears from Adam's statement about having another child after Abel's death that they knew what had happened. While the passage is silent on what must have been a grievous tragedy for Adam and Eve to have lost a child the way they did, it is safe to assume that Abel's death could have caused a great deal of grief, confusion, anger, and hurt, and possible feelings of betrayal. Perhaps, they may even have blamed God for not stopping it from happening.

Again, there is silence as to the reaction of these first parents with respect to the death of their son, but one should wonder if things were ever the same in their home again. Hypothetically, what if Adam blamed himself for Abel's death as a consequence

of his own sin? What if Eve resented Adam and ultimately blamed him? No one knows the answers, but what is also telling about this passage is that Cain seems to show no remorse. His only concern is for the harshness of his own punishment. This man committed pre-meditated capital murder, and his response shows no regard for the life of his brother.

From the Cain and Abel narrative, it is evident that not everyone who takes a life is going to feel remorse, whether as a soldier in war, or as murder in the case of Cain. Many Soldiers have killed enemy combatants in war, and they simply saw it as part of their job, feeling no remorse. Does this make them homicidal? This is not a necessary conclusion because, most of the time, there is justification for killing in war. That being said, it doesn't preclude that same soldier from feeling regret and remorse for having to kill at a later date, even though it was legally, morally, and ethically permissible to do so. Hence, we see the root origin of Moral Injury taking place at the dawn of man, and its manifestation is now emerging in a way that is now becoming known.

John Calvin provided helpful insight on this narrative by explaining that Cain could not return to God once he left the presence of God for the land of Nod. In addition, guilt and punishment followed Cain for the rest of his life. In essence, it served as a sense of torture upon his soul. Furthermore, there would be no escape for his conscience, regardless of his changes in geography.⁶ This sums up the impact of Cain's

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary On Genesis*, accessed September 10, 2015, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.html>.

legacy in a succinct fashion. His single act of murder not only tragically impacted his immediate family, but countless others as well.

A helpful perspective about this passage is provided in the New Matthew Henry Dictionary: “Cain cast off all fear of God and departed and would never return to God again. The land of Nod was characterized as a place of trembling, shaking, and uneasiness where Cain would live the remainder of his life as a vagabond where he would never find rest for his soul.”⁷ The overall perspective gained by examining this biblical text is that MI became a part of the human experience when sin entered into the world.

MI is the feeling of existential disorientation that stems from damage done to one’s moral foundations, such as when governments and people decide to go to war with one another. The question becomes, how does one heal and recover from suffering? How does one recover from the sinful actions perpetrated upon them by others, which lead them to suffer?

Suffering and Healing

Suffering and healing are common components found among those who suffer from MI, and the pathways of healing and suffering intersect one another. Scripture provides examples of many people who suffered unjustly and who genuinely struggled to make sense out of their experience. Yet, I also see a process of healing that is

⁷ Matthew Henry and Martin Manser, *New Matthew Henry Commentary: The Classic Work with Updated Language* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 10-11.

available outside the context of suffering in which many find themselves. That is to say, God does not abandon us to death; rather, he offers us a pathway that leads towards healing. A brief examination of the lives of Paul, Job, and David shows that God met them in their suffering, and they overcame their adversities, having experienced God's healing power and presence in their lives.

The Apostle Paul

If anyone understood the reality of suffering, it was the Apostle Paul. Saul from Tarsus was a very different man from Paul the Apostle.⁸ Even with the transformation that God performed on Paul's life, he never forgot who he used to be, nor the malicious things he used to do to others, even though he believed he was doing the right thing at the time.

Today, most veterans will state that combat changes a person, and what one may have envisioned prior to going into combat can be miles apart from what actually happened. Ongoing suffering, regardless of its form, can create a cloud of confusion for those trying to reconcile their experience with their moral constitution. Hence, the moral dissonance and inability to reconcile everything now haunts them in a way that, for some, can debilitate them to the point where they struggle to just function in everyday life.

⁸ 1 Timothy 1:12-17.

Paul was able to place his experiences in perspective for himself.⁹ He suffered unjust circumstances, but he used them to minister to and to encourage the saints. His experiences were the basis for his admonishments to others for them not to give up during times of persecution, suffering, trial, but rather, to affirm God's presence and comfort during those times.¹⁰

In fact, Paul was motivated to use his trials to promote the gospel and to see Christ glorified through his suffering, ailments, trials, weaknesses, and wounds.¹¹ A take away lesson from a study of Paul is that no matter how confusing, unfair, and unjust life may feel, God is still God. He does not change, he can be trusted, and he is faithful. Paul may have known the Lord in a way no one else did, and his ability to be resilient and not to implode on himself was because of who he knew God to be in his life. It was those realities that carried him through what may have been many dark nights in his soul.

In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, C.G Kruse provided an important insight in his article on Paul's Mission that served as motivation for him. In essence, there was a sense of mission, vision, and passion within Paul to make the gospel known and to see salvation reach the ends of the earth. Yet, at an even deeper level within Paul's person,

⁹ Philippians 3:4-14.

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 1:3-11.

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 12:1-10.

was a man who was affected by his past, and he used it as fuel to drive him to overcome the opposition, persecution, trials, and hardships.¹²

Job

Perhaps, no one else, aside from Jesus, understood suffering better than Job. In the first chapter of Job, a celestial contest occurs in which Job was the topic of discussion, along with what would be the first wave of attack upon his life. Chapter two recounts the second wave of attack and the resulting damage that would plunge his soul into darkness. In chapter three, Job snaps and asks the typical questions most people tend to ask when they are grieving and suffering: why, what for, where is God, and why me?

A study of the narrative quickly reveals that Job's friends were not equipped to help him on any level, nor were they able to console or comfort him. Rather, it seems as though their ignorance and uninformed approach only made matters worse for him. The story of Job presents a perspective about a broken man who asks God for answers, but hears silence for almost the entire story.

Job tries to understand the cause and purpose of his suffering. If he felt alone in his suffering, the loneliness may have only made it that much more painful for him to deal with his overwhelming loss. It is possible he felt abandoned by everyone in his life, and it seems that his friends would have been better off leaving him alone, because

¹² C.G. Kruse, "Ministry," Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid, C.G. Kruse, eds, *Dictionary Of Paul And His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 607-608.

nothing they contributed seemed helpful. On the contrary, they only exacerbated his suffering all the more. His wife told him to “curse God and die,” possibly adding to his isolation in that his own spouse did not support him in his suffering. In addition, the narrative seems to indicate that he wants to engage in a dialogue with God, but God waits to respond until the end, and when he does, it may have not been the response Job expected to hear.

In the *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Tremper Longman discussed a particular aspect about Job’s suffering in a commentary article piece how suffering in and of itself is not always the result of personal sin, and the morality of people should not be judged based upon their success of suffering.¹³ In the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Roy Zuck highlighted the undeserved ways Job suffered, and Job’s response helps to not only understand our humanity better, but to gain a deeper appreciation for the grueling process a person goes through when they are hurting.¹⁴

The following citations from Job highlight parallels in my mind of those I have known during my time in the Army who suffered from (MI):

- “I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil.”¹⁵
- “For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal.”¹⁶

¹³ Tremper Longman, III and Peter Enns, eds, *Dictionary Of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 372-374.

¹⁴ John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 715-717.

¹⁵ Job 3:26.

¹⁶ Job 5:18.

- “If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales!

It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas— no wonder my words have been impetuous. The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison; God’s terrors are marshaled against me.”¹⁷

Job seems to best exhibit some of the qualities of MI and I have wondered what Job might say about this issue to us today from his perspective. C.S Lewis wrote in *A Grief Observed* what I think is a helpful perspective about suffering and how to better shape our human instinct of wanting God to explain why and what for doesn’t always satisfy our pain:

Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, if you turn to Him then with praise, you will be welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolts and double bolts on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away.¹⁸

King David

King David is an example of a man who endured a great deal of hardship in his life. He experienced a myriad of incidents while he was the commander of Israel’s army.

¹⁷ Job 6:2-4.

¹⁸ C.S Lewis. *A Grief Observed* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2001), 5-6.

He endured exile and isolation under the rule of King Saul.¹⁹ Is it safe to assume that Jonathan's death had a great life-changing impact on David?²⁰

Yet, David's story could be characterized as one filled with triumph, joy, praise and worship. He had a deep love and passion for God, and God considered David to be a "man after His own heart."²¹ However, as great as David was, he was human and he was not without his own struggles and adversity. One could characterize other aspect of his life as being filled with danger, suspense, near death experiences, adultery, murder, a dysfunctional family system, and a fair amount of suffering throughout the process.

In 2 Samuel 11, David's moral implosion comes full circle with the pre-meditated murder of Uriah the Hittite following David's affair with his wife, Bathsheba. The ensuing death of their child along with the wreckage that fell upon his family consumed his life. As David hit his personal bottom, it could be asked, who was there for him when everything around him was falling apart? What was going on in his life before all this happened that led him to make such reckless choices?

As with many veterans with (MI), there are usually a series of events that trigger behaviors that one may not even be aware of because they have lost some of their self-awareness, and it may blur their moral compass in a way that impedes their judgment. David was first and foremost a warrior and soldier at heart. He had slain his "tens of

¹⁹ 1 Samuel 18-19.

²⁰ 2 Samuel 2.

²¹ Acts 13:22

thousands” of enemy combatants, which could lead one to assume that he personally killed an untold amount of men during his command of Israel’s army. This is who he was, and he lived the ethos of a warrior, leading his men courageously from the front every time they faced battle.

As I look back on my own experiences as an Army chaplain, having served in combat in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the images, sounds, and smells of death that surrounded me while I tried to nurture the living, care for the wounded, and comfort the dying, are things that will live with me for the rest of my life. The toll and impact of those experiences live with me to this day. If David was the soldier and warrior that Scripture seems to indicate, then it is reasonable to assume that he suffered, even if his suffering may not have been visible to others. What did his internal dialogue sound like? If he was present in our day to speak at a (MI) conference, what would he say about his own experiences as a soldier and a leader of soldiers?

It is important to note that the people we read about in the Bible, and whom we often mistakenly put on a pedestal and portray as being larger than life figures, in reality, were very real, fallible, mortal, finite human beings with limitations and genuine struggles. Failure was a common theme for most. As Christians, we need to take a step back and realize that men like Paul, Job, and David were very strong, capable, and honorable men who had their shortcomings and failures just like us. These men bled, and they dealt with personal wounds we will never know about on this side of heaven.

Still, David did not attempt to hide his struggles from God:

- “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.”²²
- “Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.”²³

To his credit, this transparency encourages all who suffer – even those with PTSD and MI – to trust, to have hope, and to find their strength and renewal in God.

David’s psalms serve as a journal of his emotions and struggles as a human being. Psalm 42 is quite telling of his struggles, showing that he underwent a great deal of stress in his life. Whether David had MI or not is something the Bible addresses, but his life offers parallel characteristics about how suffering can affect one’s life, as seen in 2 Samuel and in the Psalms, which are in keeping with the kind of characteristics typically seen with those suffering with MI. If nothing else, encouraging a veteran or soldier to examine the lives of men like Job, David, and Paul can inspire hope and reassurance that God is with the veteran just as He was with them. Sharing these profiles can bring to life men who were real people, just like today’s veterans and soldiers. Potentially, these men can develop a sort of spiritual comradery with these past legends, with the hope that maybe they see themselves in the lives of those men who were filled with similar struggles, triumphs, and sufferings. Perhaps, engaging in this process will inspire hope and courage to keep fighting and to trust in God who never fails and who is faithful to the very end,

²² Psalm 22:1-2.

²³ Psalm 22:11.

and who has a plan and purpose for their lives, which their suffering does not have to steal away from them.

Charles Swindoll wrote an amazingly insightful book on the life of David in which he highlighted in his assessment of David that he was a true worshipper and follower of Yahweh.²⁴ Yet, he was also a man with clay feet who crumbled under the pressure of temptation and suffered the painful consequences of many bad choices. Still, at the end of David's story, God declares him to be a man after his own heart.²⁵ Swindoll went on to conclude that David's life serves as a great example that God looks at the overall canvass of our lives, not just at one instance; he chooses to see the whole. Therefore, we too should not judge ourselves too harshly, but rather, know and believe that no matter what life may throw our way God does not abandon us.²⁶ David's life is one that speaks of a wounded man who found his comfort, relief, restoration, and healing in God. It was God's mercy, grace, love, and compassion that served as David's lifelines, sustaining his soul to the end.

A God of War

Now, it is time to examine the concept of war from a biblical and theological perspective. This can help one better understand MI within the context of God's

²⁴ Charles. R. Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion & Destiny* (Nashville, TN: Nelson 2008). 45-46

²⁵ Act 13:22

²⁶ Swindoll, *David*, 4.

character and activity in the Scriptures as he interacts with the world. This examination can also help us to better understand the nature of morality within warfare and the implications of the Just War theory.

The Bible, specifically the Old Testament, tells a story that might cause some to ask, “How could a loving God tell His people to kill on His behalf?” Yet, the Bible does not portray such a God.

In Exodus 20:13 God says “You shall not murder.” However, this famous commandment does not say, “Do not kill.” Unfortunately, killing and murder are easily confused. This command involves unjustified killing as a subset of killing.

During the period of conquest, God works to clear away Israel’s enemies in order to protect his people from sliding into the Canaanite pagan practices and rituals. He wants to keep them from getting drawn away from him and towards foreign gods. God was a God of war in the Old Testament, and he did authorize the killing of foreign enemies who posed a threat to not only the safety of his people, but to their spiritual purity. Conversely, God did not legitimize murder, nor did he sanctioned it. Murder and killing are not synonymous terms.

In *Show Them No Mercy*, some contributors argued that the morality of Israel’s actions against their perceived pagan neighbors were both immoral in nature and a contradiction of God’s character to endorse such action. Others agreed that the acts of war Israel committed were a necessary means to preserving what was a theocratic governed society in which God was King. Hence, by no means did God violate His

character and nature, and by no means did He slaughter populations of people out of sport.²⁷

Killing in the biblical sense has to do with taking the life of enemy combatants. On the other hand, murder has to do with taking a life for malicious purposes out of the wickedness in one's heart. One could argue that it takes wickedness to either kill or murder, and there is no distinction between the two. Yet, this view fails to consider that there may be a time and circumstance when killing may be necessary to protect and preserve innocent life, and to rescue lives from the hands of wicked perpetrators.

In David Flemming's commentary on Exodus, he discussed in his analysis how the Ten commandment's outlined the responsibilities and duties the people had in their community. In addition, his analysis went onto to describe how the Israelites were directed by God on how to build a healthy stable society and ensure for themselves a long and happy life. Furthermore, he described how the commandments were actually God's program for the community to help them love each other and create a just and ethical society, which would help mitigate things like murder. Along with that, sexual purity and treating one another with dignity and respect was another feature that facilitated God's intent for creating a just moral order²⁸ This commentary speaks of a just and ethical society that God intended for his people to manage. However, sin splits

²⁷ Stanley N Gudnry, ed, *Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

²⁸ Donald C. Flemming, "Bridgeway Bible Commentary: Exodus 20," *StudyLight.org*, accessed on July 19, 2015. <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bbc/view.cgi?bk=1&ch=20>.

the people away from God and creates a vacuum where, just like Cain, people often go in search of their own way and live by their own means. MI typically creates a condition in a person that can cause them to lose their sense of morality, and spiritual bearing. The Bible gives a clear blueprint for what God intended and what He wants for His people.

For a veteran who has been damaged and wounded in their soul, that sense of disorientation leads often to a sense of guilt that a moral judgment was violated, one that they cannot let go of. It can be even more difficult for them to reconcile their reality with a God whom they may feel has betrayed them and turned his back on them. This is a difficult road to navigate for someone who can't make sense out of anything in their world.

The Just War Theory

The Just War theory has been a topic of debate in relation to America's wars. A common theory explains that if soldiers participate in a Just War (*jus ad bellum*) as commanded by the President and Congress, and the conduct by which they fight is viewed as just (*jus in bello*) as defined by the laws of warfare, then it stands to reason that there is no reason they should not have a clear conscience. However, the Just War theory does not present the consequences of war no matter its legitimacy, and therefore it warrants questions. What are we supposed to say to a soldier who feels he was sent to fight an unjust war? What is supposed to be done when he reports that the rules of engagement and escalation of force policy he was told to fight under were

adjusted along the way to meet either a political objective, or that of his superior officers? What happens to the soul and morality of the soldier when he feels that his leaders set him up? What is to be done for the soldier when his value system is destroyed, or he is caught up in unforeseen circumstances that now leave him questioning the legitimacy of the conflict he was sent into? What is society supposed to do with a veteran who acts out of burning anger and feelings of betrayal towards her superiors about a war she now believes was wrong because of the way she was ordered to conduct herself?

The crucifixion scene in Luke 23 records an interesting statement made by a Roman Soldier: "The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, 'Surely this was a righteous man.'" In Matthew 8:9, another Roman Soldier says to Jesus, "For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." The link between these passages is that the Roman Soldiers were bound to a code of honor, ethics, and a sense of morality of just conduct. These men demonstrated their conscience within their respective statements, which highlights the reality that while our government can decide to go to war there is an inherent soul in each soldier they send, and within each soldier, an expectation that he will not be ordered to violate his conscience.

Research on combat amid extensive testimony by veterans about their memories suggests that fighting well in a just war may not be good enough. Their moral dissonance portrays the processes their consciences go through to try to bridge the gap

between their values and perceptions about combat when ideals are blurred and moral reasoning fades. Hence, MI is the testimony of how the destructive realities of combat grow into a moral inversion that is resistant to medications and various therapies.²⁹ Veterans struggle to get better because the nature of the injury they are facing is not a combat stress reaction, but a violation of the value systems they use to navigate life. The consequences of moral judgments made during war shape behavior and shatter individual belief systems to the point where a veteran's anger is directed both inward and outward. This phenomenon of internally and externally directed anger is one of the difficulties in helping one who suffers with this emotional, spiritual, and psychological reality. All this points to the psycho-somatic unity of the human experience and the convoluted nature of sin/trauma. The paramount after-effects are often quite destructive to both the person and those who try to help him. The feelings of guilt, shame, anger, and betrayal become both mental and emotional barriers that change the direction in their lives.

²⁹ Edward Tick, *War and the Soul* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005), 113.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents literature by those who are not only the most helpful on the topic of MI, but whose clinical research and insight on this topic is above and beyond anyone else this author read. These authors are recognized authorities on MI, and they include Jonathan Shay, Edward Tick, Nancy Sherman, and Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini. These individuals may be considered pioneers on the study of Moral Injury, and their insights and perspectives not only informed this author about MI, but made it possible to see this issue through many different lenses.

Nancy Sherman has written extensively about MI, and she presents many important points on this issue that helped inform my project. Jonathan Shay is a retired psychiatrist who worked at the Boston Veterans Affairs for many years, and he has worked extensively with veterans who suffer from PTSD and Moral Injury. Ed Tick is a clinical psychotherapist who has not only authored many books from his work with veterans, but he also helps to facilitate therapy groups, consisting solely of veterans. He uses methods from ancient Greek, Native American, Vietnamese, and other traditions to help bring healing and restoration within the souls of veterans.

This chapter will summarize and evaluate their work as it pertains to the biblical and theological framework constructed for this project. Each author offers key insights about the nature of Moral Injury, and they lend a perspective that is far beyond anyone else in their field of expertise.

Jonathan Shay

In *Achilles in Vietnam*,¹ Jonathan Shay provides a comprehensive perspective about his research and work with combat trauma. I found this book to be accurate regarding its explanation about MI. In fact, he is responsible for coining the term “Moral injury” around 1998, and he has been its biggest proponent and educator on it. Shay’s work on MI is best summarized in his book *Odyessus* in which he defines MI as having three parts. In summary, MI is present when (1) there has been a betrayal of what is morally correct; (2) by someone who holds legitimate authority; and (3) in a high-stakes situation. In addition, there is a term that Jonathan adopted and has used on this issue that is been commonly known within military care provider circles for a long time called “leadership malpractice” in which many service members have been subjected to this wound at the hands of commanders who did not calculate the moral cost. *Odyessus* is cousin to *Achilles*,² and proposes that MI stems from the “betrayal of ‘what’s right’ in a high-stakes situation by someone who holds power.”³ In retrospect, I wish I could have had an opportunity to sit down with Jonathan to interview him, because I found what he had to say very profound, and he helped me understand MI in a way I had not prior to reading his book. As a practitioner, he was able to present the perspectives of the

¹ Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1994).

² Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*.

³ Jonathan Shay, *Odyessus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2010), 100-200.

veteran and the clinician to help the reader understand how each perspective informed the other.

Shay discusses the fog of war in the sense of how one defines victory and defeat. In addition, he discusses the betrayal of what is right. These particular issues were prominent in the interviews I conducted, which I will share in chapter four. The heart of the matter when it comes to Moral Injury is where we see the betrayal of what is right from the veteran's perspective. It fosters questions such as, "Who gets to define what is victory and what is defeat?" and, "Should it be up to our politicians or command leadership to decide this?" No matter which of these two are declared, it doesn't necessarily mean that it is going to resonate with the soldier on the ground who has been doing the fighting and the killing. In addition, Shay presents the fairness factor wherein we need to consider the outcome of any given conflict or war because this often determines whether soldiers feel that the cause was just, or whether it was worth it. He offered the following thoughts to his readers: "learn the psychological damage that war does, and work to prevent war. There is no contradiction between hating war and honoring the soldier. Learn how war damages the mind and spirit, and work to change those things in military installations and culture that needlessly create or worsen these injuries. We don't have to go on repeating the same mistakes."⁴

The book can leave the reader wondering if caregivers are actually prepared to deal with MI unless they have prior experience dealing with some of the hard questions

⁴ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, xxiii.

veterans ask when they come home. Many soldiers ask themselves if it was fair, or just, that their buddy died in a foreign land for a cause. One of the next questions they may ask is how do they pick up their life back home, and how do they cope being around a society that mostly does not understand them. This is where it becomes hard for returning combat veterans who try to integrate back into a society that, by in large from my perspective as a veteran myself, has no appreciation for what freedom really costs.

In Shay's discussion on grief and the warrior's rage, he talks about the moral dissonance that is commonplace with sufferers of MI. He also addresses their inability to reconcile their experiences with their consciences, along with the new reality in which they find themselves. The grieving aspect of MI has many layers, and it can be attributed to the feelings of betrayal and violation many feel and struggle to make sense of.

Anyone who has been to war knows that you do not have time to think about much beyond simply trying to stay alive. It is hard to expect anyone who has not been in combat to understand how and why life gets broken down to its lowest common denominator when bombs and bullets are flying, and dead bodies are all around you.

If I were to dialogue with Shay on these matters, I would want to talk about the piece he wrote about grief and wrongful substitution. This took me back to my own experience as an Army chaplain, seeing firsthand what combat veterans go through when they are in the midst of dealing with the loss of buddies and comrades for whom they wish they could trade places. I would talk with him about the homecoming that many dread, which is directly linked to the guilt and self-condemnation that plays like a

tape in the head that says, "You did not deserve to go home." As a caregiver who supported many Soldiers who felt this way, it was always hard for me to rationalize how they were supposed to pick up the pieces, as many would assume, and be expected to move on with their life as if what they lived through was nothing more than an extended camping trip. In their mind, it just does not work that way, and in fact, for many of them, the war is not over. Often, the war comes home with those who fought it. The home front becomes the battlefield, and the ones who suffer with them are friends and families who struggle to figure out how to support and live with a soldier who wishes he was dead and who struggles to relate to those he loves.

As I reflect back on what I learned from Shay's book, something that concerns me is that our society does not know how to deal with, or handle, someone who is filled with rage, anger, confusion, hurt, and betrayal, and who feels deep internal conflict. Jonathan shared story after story about veterans who were not able to adjust or integrate back into a society that neither understands nor wants to deal with them because they are deemed too unstable, unpredictable, and dangerous to engage.

Sadly, I have to admit that what many see with our combat veterans is no illusion; many are wounded and scarred so badly I am not sure who or what will ever be able to reach them. This is all the more reason why I think God is the only one who is fully equipped to handle the morass of the matter. For the common civilian, it is simply asking too much of them to be able to handle someone who may erupt into a flying rage, and who may not be able to differentiate between them and the enemy they

fought in combat. I appreciate that Shay never sugar-coated the immense challenges of veteran care with those who suffer from PTSD and Moral Injury.

I agreed with all of Shay's propositions that veterans who suffer from war are no less part of the human family than anyone else. Yet, when our souls are tortured and violated beyond our intended design, there will be a traumatic response that may manifest itself for a lifetime. Hence, physical and moral violation destroys the capacity for a flourishing life.

Edward Tick

I looked forward to reading Edward Tick's *War and the Soul*⁵ because many consider it to be one of the leading research pieces on the topic of Moral Injury and PTSD. As I formulated my project, this text became a foundational piece for me to build my understanding of the issues, being among the very best within the clinical disciplines. The book presents treatment methods and insights being used within the scope of research and practice that are quite valuable to understand. He included a depiction about the way Hollywood portrays war versus the reality of what war truly is in that there is no glamor or hero's, or the guy in the white hat who defeats evil. He stated the following about this concept: "Ironically, John Wayne became an inspirational war movie actor during WWII yet never served or experienced war. Yet through public performances of how he, and we, wished war to be, he established himself as the model

⁵ Tick Edward, *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans From Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005).

of American Gi's. In contrast, Jimmy Stewart, who did serve, said, "When I got back from the war in 1945, I refused to make war pictures." American servicemen home from WWII were portrayed as returning with no pain. The supposed minority of psychological casualties was hidden in the back wards of veteran's hospitals. Millions of people—indeed, our entire society—seemed happy that the great adventure was over. America was proud of its participation in the world wide battle against evil and moved on to the good life as defined by consumerism."⁶ What this presents in a clear sense to me is the concept of total disconnect on the part of the civilian population which traditionally during and after each war have failed to grasp, understand, nor connect to the realities of war, and more importantly, the men and women who have come home badly damaged by war. The grossest assumption made by the public is that all is well because our military has been portrayed throughout time as being strong and invincible. Just watch the recruiting commercials on tv and they too advertise United States military as such. Therefore, the impression the public has is nothing new, and what Tick said about WWII could be said of my generation as well, having come home from both Iraq and Afghanistan myself to a society seemably completely indifferent, acting as if those of us who just returned from war would be able to just flip the switch and act as if what we came home from was nothing more than a great extended camping adventure. To make matters worse, the only way the public seems to be able to connect to any of this is

⁶ Edward, *War and the Soul*, 156.

through cable news networks. Therefore, one is simply left to their own interpretations based on what the media feeds them.

The way Tick describes the soul runs parallel to what mainstream evangelical theology presents on the soul in terms of its function. He states that the soul is the seat of our reasoning and intellectual prowess. This is consistent with this author's view, and the general view represented in the evangelical community. In addition, the soul is our individual will and center of volition. Furthermore, the soul is our aesthetic sensibility that desires and seeks beauty and which appreciates it.

Mythology and history are full of stories in which the loss of cherished friends impels one to kill. In the *Iliad*, Achilles had to quit the field of combat after he lost faith in the cause—as soldiers have done from mythical Troy through modern Iraq.⁷

The way he describes the effects that trauma can have upon the soul were very insightful, and they can help one better understand how one's sensory faculties can diminish as a result, i.e. emotional detachment, frozen feelings, and moral dissonance. If I had the chance to sit down with Ed, I would like to dialogue with him about ways spiritual ministry can help facilitate treatment of MI. Likewise, I would want to understand from his perspective ways spiritual ministry may not help. In other words, what approaches or methodologies may do more harm than good in spite of well-intentioned efforts by ministers who want to help?

⁷ Tick, *War and the Soul*, 89.

Tick's methodology and view of treatment were very insightful, and I feel that I better understand his treatment philosophy. I do disagree with his perspective on Greek mythology and the way he views it within his philosophy of treatment. In addition, I discovered that he draws from many non-Christian traditions that he believes are therapeutic in nature to treat and facilitate healing for wounded souls. Furthermore, I got a clear impression that he relies a lot on the insights provided by Greek mythology in terms of informing the nature of soul care, which I think certainly deviates away from what I would endorse as a framework of healing. Rather, in place of this perspective, I would present a biblical model of healing.

To better understand why Tick has this view, I had to look at how he used the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which are twin epic mythical accounts written by Homer to articulate the way people within the culture assisted in the healing process of those who came home wounded from war. The *Iliad* tells the tale of a decade long war between the Trojans and the Greeks, in which one of the hero's was Odysseus. The *Odyssey* gives an account of the adventures of Odysseus upon his return from war, which spanned another ten years and highlighted his struggle to transition from his war experience back into a society he no longer felt he knew. Tick considers these literary works to be among the greatest of its kind and helps to provide a visual of the process of homecoming a combat soldier goes through when returning from war.

I saw a prevalent link to Tick's perspective on healing that centered on not only Greek mythology, but also on Native American Shamanistic spirituality practices. It also included other forms of eastern spirituality that are common within the Vietnamese

culture. Therefore, reading this book requires carefully filtering what may be helpful to a veteran from a Christian perspective. Overall, the lack of a biblical framework presented alongside the other spiritual frameworks that he clearly seemed to endorse was disappointing.

Having read and understood his clinical perspective and methodology, it should be noted that his intentions were honorable and commendable; in spite of my fundamental disagreement with his worldview. It is also clear that he has helped numerous veterans recover from their injury, and he deserves a great deal of credit for this work, in spite of the fact that his presentation of God was not from a Christian worldview.

The most bothersome aspect of his treatment philosophy is that he teaches veterans to reinvent or redefine their spirituality in whatever way they choose. This may be framed in the “self” as the source of inspiration, devoid of a belief in a higher power. Another option may be that their spirituality be formed from a mix of mythological and metaphysical based traditions. While Tick never dismissed Christianity as a resource veterans should consider, his practices seem to revolve around mythical and eastern traditions. He does not offer veterans the God who is healer, counselor, prince of peace, and friend.

His application of native wisdom of Northern American Indians and, shamanistic practices found from various cultures, especially the Vietnamese, are misguided means he uses to help combat the violence inflicted upon souls. Equally troubling is his abandonment of conventional forms of therapy which led him to adapt his treatment

methods to soul healing therapies rooted in shamanistic rituals, fashioning ancient healing methods for his participants. Part of his selling point is to help veterans release the troubles upon their souls that they brought home with them.

While I disagree with Ed's worldview on his methods of treatment, the book is still an excellent resource to understand the nature of Moral Injury. His account of veterans and their afflictions helps us better understand the traumatic impact of war and violence, and the ways it inflicts wounds so deep that we need to examine and address them with compassion and attention to detail. Few get what these veterans are trying to ask for, which is to heal from the inside out. The process he presents is something that I think misses the mark from my perspective as a Christian. I do not think that his therapeutic model of functioning is adequate to explain or treat such wounds. This is all the more reason why applying a Christian perspective is so vital to helping veterans see their need for God and how He can heal those wounds.

This book does recognize the tremendous need of veterans who struggle to deal with their problems. Most who come for help are at their lowest point, and they desperately need compassion and understanding from caregivers who understand where they are coming from. Ed Tick is one of those who not only gets it, but possesses the skill set to help them. I may not agree with all of his methods, but he is a leader in this field and he offers a perspective that lends great insight and motivation to get involved.

Nancy Sherman

Published in 2015, Nancy Sherman's *Afterwar*⁸ is a landmark piece on Moral Injury that offers the most current thought and analysis. Nancy fills the pages of her text with powerful first-hand testimony given by combat veterans. She makes the point that there are over 2.6 million service members who have returned, and who are still returning, home from the battlefields America has fought on during the past fourteen years. She is Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University and was the inaugural Distinguished Chair in Ethics at the United States Naval Academy. Now, it should not be lost on anyone that the U.S is back in Iraq fighting ISIS, and this new fight may introduce another generation of men and women who will potentially come home with wounds within their soul.

Nancy presents a case study about an Army Captain named Josh Mantz who suffers with Moral Injury from a combat engagement in Baghdad, during which he lost one of his close friends. He also almost died, being resuscitated after flatlining for over fifteen minutes. Reading this story hit home fast for me as I too was deployed to Baghdad at the same time, and I vaguely recall hearing about him as it is possible he was brought into the treatment facility I helped to support.

In reality, I saw numerous soldiers like Josh who either made it or did not. But his story resonates with me in that while he survived and got to go home, the war came home with him. He struggled with his identity and his ability to make sense out of who

⁸ Sherman Nancy, *Afterwar: Healing the Moral Wounds of Our Soldiers* (New York, NY: Oxford, 2015).

he was. Josh is a case study that highlights the reality of how MI can impact one's life and the questions that are so hard for them to answer for themselves. Nancy presents the story behind the person in a way that enabled me to connect with them on a human level.

One aspect of this book that I found helpful was Nancy's interaction with Moral Injury from a holistic perspective. She did not just talk about psychology and medicine, but the spiritual as well. She earned a lot of credibility by bringing into the discussion how wounds like MI affect the whole person, allowing her case studies to shape the conversation. Not too many of the books I read did this as it seems to be human nature to become fixated on the physical and psychological wounds caused by war, while not looking close enough at the invisible wounds that are moral in nature.

If I had a chance to dialogue with Nancy about her book, I would want to dig deeper into her talk about "lost goodness." Within this aspect of MI, there is the context of shame, guilt, self-condemnation, and the inability to forgive oneself. From a spiritual perspective, this can be a very difficult process to work through because there are many layers to penetrate in order to understand the true nature of these wounds.

She brought Moral dissonance into the context of the discussion with those she interviewed in terms of shaping how each one lost their sense of goodness about mankind and the world. When one's idealized values have been compromised by uncontrollable circumstances, a vacuum can be created that the person does not know how to fill. Nancy clearly understood that there is a web of complexity to the struggles veteran's face while trying to come to terms with wounds no one can see. I think she

also understood that this tends to be a very lonely process for most, and most choose to face it by themselves because they do not want to talk about what they went through, what they did, and what they saw.

From my perspective of having served in combat in both Iraq and Afghanistan as a chaplain, I saw many stoic faces, and I could detect the numbness in many facial expressions of those who survived terrible things. That alone told me enough at the time to understand where these particular men and women were in terms of their spiritual and emotional state. Nancy was able to bring out the human element of MI when she discussed what it is like to lose the very essence of what makes us human, and for some, talking about their war experience only causes more pain for them because they are reliving it all over again when they do not want to. They simply want to forget it, but don't know how.

Therefore, when we discuss what MI truly is, one must understand that this wound is truly spiritual, deeply imbedded into the core of one's identity and very nature of what makes him human. This brings me back to a point that I made in chapter two, that God created us as emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual beings, and our souls were not designed to absorb such intense trauma. Many veterans have suffered wounds on every level, and while most physical wounds can, and often do, fully heal, the moral lacerations and blunt force trauma inflicted on the soul are wounds that penetrate far

deeper than any physical wound. Nancy talked about the need to develop self-empathy and being able to frame shame and guilt around the context of being able to feel again.⁹

Another key area that is insightful and helpful in this book is Nancy's talk about how to rebuild trust. Within that process, there is the painful process of coming to terms with things one cannot change and realizing that they cannot stay where they are forever; they need to start rebuilding their life at some point. To rebuild trust has to be built from the bottom up, and the process to do so depends on the person.

Nancy used the example about the struggle to move forward in life by highlighting what is a common statement civilian's make towards men and women in uniform where they say "Thank you for your service." For most, it is one of the aggravating, ignorant, and superficial things one person could say to another because it makes the combat veteran feel like what they have gone through can be summarized by a simple thank you. In response to the typical reactions given by both veteran and civilians, Nancy did not let either off the hook. The veteran's response should not be seclusion in order to avoid a world they do not feel understands them. Conversely, the civilian's response should not be to withdraw or to believe that they are being meddlesome or presumptive to think they have anything to offer to someone who despises them in the first place.

I would have enjoyed having a dialogue with Nancy on this topic of rebuilding trust because I believe it goes to the nature of where the soul is. As I read her narrative

⁹ Nancy, *Afterwar*, 97-98.

on this, I came to an agreement with her in understanding that in order to trust again there has to be some sort of reconciliation with what caused trust to be broken in the first place. In addition, it is important to begin healing from the wounds, albeit for some that process could take a lifetime.

There are no easy answers, but the point she made in her narrative is something that makes sense in that one has a choice to allow his wounds to eat away at him and eventually destroy his life, or one can choose to deal with what it is and work towards healing her life to the extent of what is possible and rebuild from that which was destroyed. This is where resiliency comes into play, and the men and women Nancy presented are true examples of people who have struggled terribly to pick up the pieces of their lives, and try to start living again. For most of them, rebuilding trust may take on a different look than it would for someone who has not suffered the level of trauma they have endured. The healing that occurs in the area of learning to trust again is always going to be a guarded process.

The last piece to Nancy's book that I want to present is how to rebuild hope. I like how she walked the reader through the transformation that took place with the men and women she interviewed, and how their lives changed over the course of time as they healed and recovered. She talked about a veteran named Dan who now has a new set of legs, and who is an active participant in his own life, having a new purpose and passion to dive into. She talked about the hope that some of these veterans have in each other in terms of the support system they offer one another. Truly, there is a

brotherhood among these veterans, and more and more are reaching out to one another so that those who have struggled alone do not have to be alone anymore.

Hope is essential to anyone's survival, and without it, there is not a reasonable way to continue. I consider each redeemed life now filled with hope to really exemplify the human will and spirit to not give up, finding a way to survive. Hope is what resiliency is all about, and while it may look different to any given person, the essence of how we survive from that which almost destroyed us is learning how to hope again. Call it survival instinct or survival of the fittest; both may be true when it comes down to how we as people are able to overcome great adversity. At the end of the day, hope is what can reignite our souls, and hope can give us the fuel we need to fight to live another day. Overall, I found *Afterwar* to be a thoughtful literary piece on MI that is filled with an expertise on what is an emerging issue. This book is a voice for those who did not have one before, and it calls out to veterans to know that it is okay to come forward and to know that there is help!

Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini

This pair's text, *Soul Repair*, is one of the most poignant books on MI from a perspective that understands the nature of this wound first hand.¹⁰ Rita and Gabriella bring insight into helping the reader see MI through the lenses of morality and conscience. Rita's heritage links her to where she was born near Nagasaki, Japan. Her

¹⁰ Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini, *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War* (New York, NY: Random House, 2012).

stepfather was a soldier in the U.S Army, and he served in both WWII as a POW and in Vietnam as a combat medic. Reading and understanding her background story can provide a feeling of identity and compassion for what she not only endured. It also explains why she holds to what seems to be a pacifist view on war. Gabriella was part of an Italian family that had direct contact with the Nazis in WW II. The impact of MI on her family extended well beyond the following decades of her life.

The input these two authors bring to this book is a firsthand take of how Moral Injury not only impacts the soldier and veteran, but also the families, who incur wounds from their exposure to those who have been deeply scarred by war. The case studies they presented provided a clear message that speaks of the traumatic wounds war inflicts upon the souls of those who suffer the moral consequences. They highlighted the journeys of Herm, Mac, and Pamela. Herm was an Army chaplain who served in Vietnam and his story provides the picture of a man who had seen the horrors of war and whose views of war were shaped rather quickly by it. They presented a quote from one of their interviews with an Army Soldier named Josh Middleton which I think captures the essence of how MI can impact the lives of service members returning from war unable to adjust or make sense out of the world around them after having experienced combat: "A lot of things really make sense when you're doing them over there. But when you come back, it's just like, "how did I do that?" It's just like a totally different world. Everything is kind of muted, and I'm never really happy. I don't really enjoy things. I just feel hopeless and listless. And I just feel like I don't fit in with other kids my age. It's just like...I don't know. It's just really hard to relate to anyone. I want,

more than anybody else, to find a meaning to my experience over there, and something good to feel about. But I just can't find it."¹¹

Mac is an Iraq war veteran whose experience in combat led him to question his leadership, and the cause and purpose for why he was there in the first place. His wounds were created out of a context whereby trust was shredded and truth was blurred by command orders. Pamela is a veteran whose son served in the Army and suffered MI from his deployment in Iraq at the beginning of the war. Her testimony of how Moral Injury affected her family depicts the reality of how deep the wounds of war can scar.

If I were to have a dialogue with Rita and Gabriella, I would want to talk to them about how they view the experiences shared by Herm, Mac, and Pamela from a global perspective. I disagree with what seems to be an overarching premise, philosophy, and message presented in the book that seems to endorse a general conscientious objection view towards war. I would argue that, in spite of how destructive war tends to be, sometimes it is the necessary and only means available to accomplish peace. So, in many cases, it becomes a moral imperative to confront and attack those tyrannical regimes or governments whose actions are inhumane and devoid of moral and ethical rationale.

I believe I understand why they hold the views they do based on personal experience. However, from a global perspective, I think their views are unrealistic in

¹¹ Brock and Lettini, *Soul Repair*, 45.

nature to think that opposing all war is going to mitigate conflict and promote peace. Sometimes, war is inevitable, and it becomes the necessary vehicle for stopping the advancement of evil in our world. I don't believe that diplomacy and political means are always sufficient to preventing the growth and lethality of evil dictatorships or radical ideologies that purport the killing and suffering of innocent life. I had the privilege of interviewing Herm, and I will share that content in chapter four. Suffice to say, I can understand from his outlook why he holds the perspectives he does regarding war.

As a former Army chaplain who has seen excessive amounts of death and trauma from my two combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, I can say that I wholeheartedly agree with the authors that war is a terrible thing and that we should do everything we can to avoid it in order to save those lives it damages, the lives of those who suffer its rage. That being said, sometimes it just is not possible to avoid because of the evil in our world. I would want to voice this view with the authors because sometimes war is the necessary vehicle to stopping the advancement evil and restoring the peace that will allow the good to rule.

This is not to say that war does not damage and wound, because it does, no matter whether it is just or not. Even in a just war, people die as a part of the cause; there simply is no way to avoid this. Death and suffering are inevitable consequences of war, in spite of its best rationale. Yet, the overarching goal of going to war is not to prevent killing from happening, but rather to achieve the larger goal from preventing agents of evil from inflicting more death and suffering, if not stopped. Hence, in the process of trying to preserve life some lives are lost as part of that effort.

This is why we honor the lives and sacrifice these men and women pay in service to their country, and the ultimate payment they made on behalf of their country to carry out good and to stop evil from triumphing. The problem is that some who have MI view the portrayal of honor by the government towards those who made the ultimate sacrifice as an act of betrayal and a lie. Unfortunately, there is always going to be mixed emotions and opinions on this issue because of the nature of the issue. Some are going to see the sacrificial loss of life as being on behalf of a grateful nation, while others can only see betrayal and deception as the root cause and effect of an unjustified war.

I found myself in agreement with the authors on their presentation that killing changes a person. Herm, Mac, and Pamela saw with their own eyes how war can damage and destroy. When I read the perspectives represented by these three people, it is almost too easy to see the signs and symptoms of MI because there is a common link found of one's morality and conscience being violated by a system that only seems to care about the end state and not what it does to those who carry out its objectives.

This injury wages war on the soul beyond the war itself, and there are no medications that can make the soul feel any less numb. This is why I believe only the Spirit of God is ultimately capable of healing these wounds. I found the presentation about how coming home is hell to be very true to what I have seen myself with MI. The real struggle for those returning home is how to make sense out of the world in which they live when they just returned from a world in which killing was almost a sport for some and a switch that is hard to turn off for others. For Pamela's son, he could not participate in the killing of Iraqi's because he felt that killing anyone was fundamentally

wrong. Herm could not reconcile what he saw and experienced on the battlefield with life back in the States. The adjustment period for most is very difficult and requires a great deal of patience and understanding from those who walk with them. From the beginning, Mac felt misled about the war he had to fight, and now back home, he fights a war with himself that requires a degree of healing that may take a lifetime to accomplish.

The authors painted what in reality is the picture of what Moral Injury is in all practicality; it is something you simply have to learn how to live and deal with. MI is not just about the wrongs some of our veterans feel that they committed against others, but also against themselves. This is part of the testimony about Mac in that he shared how Moral Injury not only affected his life, but how it also gave him an opportunity to work towards healing and overcoming his wounds.

Something I would have liked to have seen in the book was the author's biblical and theological framework on this issue. I found no reference to Christ in this book, much less any biblical references. This surprised me because Rita is a Christian and a member of a mainline evangelical denomination. From my perspective, when I think about soul repair, I do not see in any way, shape, or form, how it is possible to heal MI without Christ at the center, through the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Rather, I saw a depiction of soul repair being portrayed in more nebulous terms, without an identified spiritual framework. Overall, I feel like there was a missed opportunity here for the authors to flesh out their views of healing. As a reader, I would have liked to have interacted with their spiritual system of beliefs.

This was a helpful book, and it delivered helpful insights on Moral Injury that enabled me to understand it from the point of view of two authors who have been exposed to this condition their whole life. While I disagree with some of the outlooks and viewpoints presented by the authors and the three case study participants, this is a valuable book to help a reader understand how this issue is being addressed within the community who understand it better than anyone else.

I feel that I learned a lot from my research on MI, and I will now share some of the insights and perspectives I gained that helped to shape my view of this issue. I selected the four books that I featured for my literary review because they represent the thought, and clinical and philosophical expertise, I was looking for to inform me when I started to formulate my research. There are many other books that I read which also provided much the same thought process, analysis, and insight. I feel it would have been redundant to present a review of those books because the four that I presented already provided those resources for me. Those additional books that I researched from are as follows:

- *Killing From The Inside Out* by Robert Emmert Meagher¹²
- *Odysseus In America* by Jonathan Shay¹³
- *Warrior's Return: Restoring The Soul* by Edward Tick¹⁴

¹² Robert Emmet Meagher, *Killing From The Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

¹³ Shay, *Odysseus in America*.

¹⁴ Edward Tick, *Warrior's Return: Restoring the Soul after War* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2014).

- *The Things They Cannot Say* by Kevin Sites¹⁵
- *God Is Not Here* by Lieutenant Colonel Bill Russell Edmonds¹⁶
- *Moral Repair* by Margaret Urban Walker¹⁷

In my research, I learned from these books that, when it comes to understanding the nature of what Moral Injury is, there is no cut and dry way to figure it out, and there are no black and white conclusions. As I stated in chapter one, this is an emerging issue, and because of that, I believe there is much more that we do not know yet about MI. In addition, I believe that more research and analysis will be done going forward, and this will offer knowledge and understanding that we currently do not yet have. Clearly, this is an issue that pertains to the soul, matters of the conscience, and one's moral constitution or make up. Therefore, as I studied these books, I found from all the authors that they believe that much more is to be learned and formulated through research and clinical work with our veterans and service members.

I was able to confirm that, even within the secular realm, there is not a great deal of awareness and understanding about MI as there is about PTSD. In addition, I am afraid that more people than not are more apt to confuse MI with PTSD, not seeing the distinction between the two. Furthermore, the focus of soul care is something that

¹⁵ Kevin Sites, *The Things They Cannot Say* (New York, NY: Harper, 2013).

¹⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Bill Russell Edmond, *God Is Not Here: A Soldier's Struggle with Torture, Trauma, and the Moral Injuries of War* (New York, NY: Pegasus Books, 2015).

¹⁷ Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge, 2006).

should be approached with a view in mind towards spirituality and the divine as being at the center of healing and recovery. Ed Tick is onto this, which is why he has integrated spirituality into the core of his treatment practices. While I disagree with the means he uses, such as eastern and Native American spirituality, even as a secular physician, he understands that there is a spiritual component to helping veterans heal and recover from their wounds.

People react to their injuries in various ways, and they possess different thresholds in terms of how they cope with MI. Some handle things better than others, and they are able to function reasonably well in life, in spite of their struggles. I learned from the case studies that there many combat veterans are resilient and have found ways to bounce back in their lives, finding hope and renewal to keep going. Others are in a place in their life in which they are having a hard time dealing with their reality; they are undergoing a hard transition back into a world that no longer makes sense to them.

Overall, I learned that Moral Injury is a condition that attacks the very core of our being and hurts the image of God that we were created to be. God created us to be emotional, moral, rational beings who are designed with an ethical compass that possesses an innate sense of right and wrong. When the soul is assaulted to the point where it becomes numb, how is one expected to heal? I will take a look at this in chapter four as a veteran and a caregiver by presenting seven case studies of people I interviewed, who shared with me what healing looks like to them.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

The most important piece of this research on Moral Injury is centered on the interviews conducted with a group of people to whom I am indebted for having made the greatest and most meaningful contribution to this project. For the project design, the interview is the tool that provides the best avenue to learn about MI. In addition, this tool can provide the means to easily measure, analyze, evaluate, and present part of the overall findings on this topic in clear and understandable terms. Furthermore, the interviews can offer a balanced perspective on MI from both a military and a civilian point-of-view.

The overall goal of the project design sought to show how MI impacts people's lives through direct testimony provided by the soldier, veteran, and caregiver. Interviews can provide tremendous insight into real issues such as moral dissonance. Therefore, a series of semi-informal interviews, consisting of an audience representing a mixture of veteran and civilian participants, male and female, can provide the deepest reservoir of information. This is the format I chose to conduct my interviews and I found it to be very helpful and effective for what I set out to accomplish. With this in mind, a list of questions for each respective interviewee was tailored to give more personalized feedback.

The project was designed to discover as much as possible about Moral Injury from the literary resources and the personal interviews who were either victims of MI,

or were in a caregiver role helping those who have it. It is important for the Christian community to understand and be aware of MI because Moral Injury is an emerging issue that will earn greater levels of attention within the scope of how veterans care could be viewed and provided for, over the next several years. Hopefully, as a result of this project, more people within the Christian community, especially caregivers, will become more aware of the issues many of our war veterans face and struggle to deal with, enabling them to effectively minister to those who suffer with these wounds.

Jose

Jose was an Army combat infantryman who served two combat tours during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and he characterized his overall combat experience as life-changing. I asked Jose to describe the nature of his MI, and how it developed and affected him during both combat and his return home. He stated his injury began to develop as a result of the excessive amounts of death and trauma he saw during his two deployments. Jose lost a considerable number of close friends who were killed in action during these deployments.

I asked Jose to characterize the changes he noticed in his life mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, as a result of his combat experience: **“All I know is everything about me changed. I was no longer the guy I used to be before I came to**

Iraq. I lost myself, and to this day I am still struggling to find who I am so I really don't know how else to answer that.”¹

He shared that when a soldier is in combat, he inherits who he considers to be his true family, a brotherhood of guys with whom he bonds. The relationships with the guys he fought alongside became his support system, and they remain so to this day. He shared that he lost his innocence in Iraq because of what he saw and what he was ordered to do. He never imagined he would have to kill another human being, but he shared, **“When you are in war, you realize that it is either you or them, and so the choices get narrowed down quickly.”** He said that he and his guys all knew that the only ones they could truly depend on were each other.

Each homecoming for Jose proved to be an even tougher fight for him than the ones he faced in Iraq. While many celebrated him and gave him a hero's welcome, Jose retreated into his own private world of withdrawal and isolation. He struggled with the loss of several friends who were killed in action. His soul felt numb, and he struggled to reconcile what went on “over there” with the world to which he returned that now seemed distant to him.

I asked him to describe his struggles during the transition from combat zone to home. He stated:

While I knew I was back home mentally, the meaning of what home was took on new meaning to me. Home was no longer what it used to be to me, and every other part of me wanted to be back in Iraq with those guys. We were family, and “over there” is what had become home to us. I've never been able

¹ Jose, interview by author, Palo Alto, CA, June 4, 2015.

to get over how some of us were able to survive and come back home to what? It has been the hardest thing I've ever had to deal with, and nothing has ever made sense anymore to me. I came home so screwed up that I lost the ability to relate to my wife, and lost the ability to feel period, and there was nothing I could do about it. Iraq changed me so much that I became a completely different person. When I walked into my house, I knew my wife could tell I wasn't the guy she married anymore. As far as the Army, they really didn't do anything to help me when I came home, and the care we got was a waste of time because I knew all they wanted was for me to be able to go back and do it all over again. We all knew that; so we learned to keep everything to ourselves and not tell any of the care providers much of anything. When I did try to talk about my struggles with one of my senior NCO's (Non-Commissioned Officer), he told me that if I wanted to stay in the Army and get promoted, to keep my mouth shut and not say anything that could get me booted out. So, what it really boils down to is, I've never really dealt with any of my issues from either deployment. And because of that, everything eventually came crashing down on me. I went from being forced by my command to get treatment for PTSD in a locked down mental unit, to getting served divorce papers, to losing a lot of friends for reasons I don't even know why.²

Jose described his need to withdraw and isolate himself from loved ones, and people in general, as his coping strategy to deal with being back home. He said,

To this day, I can't be around crowds like at the mall. I sit against the back wall when I go out to restaurants, and I sit against the back wall of movie theaters, as well. This is all based on a need to feel secure and to control my environment. When I came home, all I dealt with were people who couldn't understand me and began to question what was wrong with me. I could hear more and more people talking about me, asking what happened to me. I just got sick of hearing it, and I let them all walk away, and it was easy because, to me, they really weren't who I considered my true family, anyway.³

In the conclusion of the interview, I asked Jose what he would say to an audience of caregivers if given a podium to talk about his experience. He focused his comments to encouragement to them to speak with their congressmen about helping guys like him to

² Jose, interview.

³ Jose, interview.

find meaningful jobs. In addition, he stated that guys like him need a sense of purpose and a way to feel like they can become a part of society, again. Furthermore, he said that healing for guys like him is something that is probably never going to fully happen in their lifetime, but finding something meaningful to do with their lives is a starting point to finding themselves again.

The interview with Jose was very insightful, and it took me back to my own experiences and memories in Iraq. He mirrored much of the same things I saw and heard during my combat tours as an Army chaplain, and he represented many of the soldiers I counselled. His story was their story, and the impact that combat had on him I saw in them, too. He gave a broader understanding of Moral Injury from the perspective that not only do most veterans suffer alone, but most revert back to the community where the injury happened. This means that the community they are a part of takes on the look and feel of what is commonly known as a tribal bond, or an exclusive club of men who support one another, where admission to membership are found in their invisible wounds that only they can understand. From a spiritual perspective, I am not sure where Jose is in his relationship with God, and I sensed what seemed to be a possible disconnect. I chose not to probe too much into this area with him, but he will remain in my prayers. It is my hope that Jose will one day find a meaningful connection with God through the Holy Spirit, and that he will experience God's love, grace, and healing in a real and powerful way.

Jeff

Army Chaplain (COL) Jeff is a Senior Military Fellow at the National Defense University, and he teaches Ethics and Strategic Leadership at the Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy. Jeff has served for almost thirty years and has extensive experience ministering to combat soldiers who suffer with MI. He offers a wealth of knowledge about MI that I wanted to learn. I have known Jeff since 2006, and I served under him during my first assignment at Ft. Carson. In the Fall of 2006, we deployed together to Iraq where saw firsthand the realities of MI present in many of the soldiers to whom we ministered, most often in traumatic settings. I owe a great deal of credit to Jeff for helping me with my research as he guided me to where to find most of the books and resources that I have studied for this project.

Jeff began his journey as a chaplain when he was a young Minnesota National Guard chaplain during the 1980's. During that time, he interacted with many Vietnam veterans and began to uncover what he considered to be a spiritual injury. However, over time, as he continued his dialogue with Vietnam veterans, he came to know what he now understands as MI. Jeff comes from a denomination that endorses pacifism and supports conscientious objection. He said it was in the mid 1990's when he entered active duty that he received training on this topic as he prepared to deploy to Bosnia and Kosovo. This training began to marinate in his thoughts as he considered soldier care. He cited some of the key authors I have presented in this paper as having great influence on how he has thought about this issue and how it helped him develop a framework around the issue.

I asked Jeff what his theological and spiritual perspectives were on MI as a minister and caregiver. He discussed how the Bible helps us understand the nature of broken humanity in light of God's love and forgiveness. The Bible also helps us understand people's specific brokenness and the need for grace and healing, in spite of what has injured them. He also stated that he has come across many soldiers who have conscientiously objected to the wars in which they have fought, but they still did their jobs, in spite of their feelings. These soldiers need the ability to filter and reconcile their experience with their belief and value systems, and to find a pathway of healing with which they can connect.

Furthermore, understanding that God wants to engage with us helped him develop a spiritual framework around MI. This is about our ability to realize and acknowledge our brokenness caused by our sin and the sins inflicted upon us by others. Only then can we better understand and appreciate the true nature of God's grace and how unconditional it truly is. Jeff described that he got his real interaction with MI through several Army nurses who served in Vietnam, in addition to his own personal experience while serving in Task Force Ranger during the raid on Somalia. His spiritual perspectives were both tested and shaped into what it is through some of these experiences and interactions.

I asked Jeff what he would consider, as a caregiver, to be the most and least helpful strategies for ministering to combat veterans. He shared a perspective with me that made a lot of sense and helped sharpen my own understanding of what spiritual care should look like. He stated: **"It is important to let people have a voice and tell their**

stories, this is how the healing process begins. It is hard for them to name the unnamable but there has to be a place for them to start and letting them tell their story is the best place to begin, and as a caregiver it is vital to simply listen and then facilitate a dialogue with them.”

Discussing the least helpful strategy, Jeff stated:

Too many care providers and well-intentioned leaders have made the mistake of telling a soldier that they are going to tell them what they are thinking and feeling when what they should be doing is listening and allowing the soldier tell them what their thoughts and feelings are, and simply show that they care. I’ve seen a lot of people who are unable to name their problem and they tend to handle it in very dysfunctional ways, whether retreating into isolation, or losing an ongoing battle with their anger in ways they can’t control or understand. They also tend to fall into patterns of chemical abuse and cycle through numerous broken and failed relationships. As a caregiver, we need to understand these factors and how they play into the psyche of the person we are dealing and find the angle that will work for them and enable us to start helping them.⁴

I asked Jeff to describe what he saw as the greatest challenges veterans and current military members who suffer from MI face. He stated that he comes at this issue much differently than most people he knows who are looking at this issue. He stated:

Nobody has talked about how MI is different from PTSD. The two are not the same, and I haven’t seen yet where we are taking the time to define how the two are different. The reason why this is happening is because we don’t see them as being different, and so instead we are treating the symptoms instead of healing root causes. The root cause is moral dissonance, and people can’t find peace with it, and that is why it doesn’t get better. People with MI are sort of like a pressure cooker where if they allow their injury simmer too long, it is eventually going to explode, and if it doesn’t explode, it is going to seep into different aspects of our lives. Because we can’t reconcile what we went through in combat with the lives we live now.⁵

⁴ Army Chaplain Jeff, interview by author, Palo Alto, CA, June 18, 2015.

⁵ Army Chaplain Jeff, interview.

I asked Jeff to characterize how he understands God's role in helping veterans heal from MI. He discussed one challenge many churches face is that while most tend to be concerned with programming, these veterans really need people with whom they can connect who are available and willing to walk with them. This is not to say the church is ineffective or a poor medium to offer help, but what these soldiers need goes beyond how churches are typically designed to function.

Through a guided focus group, veterans can start to mine the depths of what reconciliation means for them, and to gain a better understanding about God in what He could and could not do for them in the combat situations that caused their injury. Jeff discussed how important it is to talk about the ugly stuff of life to prepare a pathway to overcome feelings of helplessness and to provide an ability to name what broke them. Once soldiers can name it, they can see how God can heal and forgive them. Hence, they need to see God as one who grows things, rather than as one who only permits the evils that destroy.

I asked Jeff how caregivers can and should help. He stated: **"Listening is key. We need to learn how to walk with these people where they are at and offer them a caring presence, which means everything for that person seeking spiritual care. And it helps to establish a connection that can lead to talking about it and form a dialogue that can expand into facilitating how God can heal them."**⁶

⁶ Army Chaplain Jeff, interview.

He went on to discuss how one of the biggest problems or roadblocks he thinks chaplains create for themselves is that most come with their own religious agendas. He stated: **“While it may be a strength and an anchor for where we’re at as ministers, it may not be where that man or woman is, and we need to realize that. We need to understand that we don’t and nor should we let go of what we believe, but at the same time understand that what we believe can become an open door.”**⁷ Jeff elaborated further that he believes training can be a helpful tool to equip younger chaplains by helping them to understand the care team concept and where they fit within the care-giving process.

Jeff and I discussed how he felt caregivers should engage self-care. He explained that he thinks this topic goes beyond the caregivers to the leaders because they tend to face incredible amounts of pressure, stress, and demand. They need a release valve to help alleviate the burdens they carry, too. As he continued, he asked the question, **“How do individuals understand their need for renewal?”** In addition, he asked: **“How do we grow that sense of renewal for ourselves?”** He stated that what may work for him in his life may not be what works for someone else. He cited different personality types and spiritual practices as to how this may look from the outside looking in. He stated: **“If we can’t find a way to renew ourselves, then we are always going to be in**

⁷ Army Chaplain Jeff, interview.

demand mode instead of receive mode, and it is going to lead to burnout every time. People need things that they feed off of and helps to energize them.”⁸

This interview went above and beyond what I was hoping to uncover about MI and the role of the caregiver. Jeff offered thirty years of hard-earned wisdom gained from many trials and errors, and also from great successes and hopeful outcomes. He presented ground-truth experience in dealing with what is a very complicated injury to understand, and one I hope will be looked at in a deeper way as it emerges over the next several years. Jeff’s perspectives and insights are at the tip of the spear on this issue, and his work and contributions will only help to push this effort further as it gains more light and attention.

Kirk

Kirk served two tours in Vietnam during the war, and his interview collaborated everything with this project’s research on MI. He has lived with MI most of his life, and his testimony alone is the most powerful part of what my project design is all about. He shared how it began, how it developed, how it affected him, and the processes he has gone through over the years to heal and recover from it. He provided profound and powerful insights about MI, showing me that there was no better proving ground for me to test my hypothesis on this issue than to hear it straight from someone who still lives with MI after forty years.

⁸ Army Chaplain Jeff, interview.

This interview was so powerful, it was necessary to share as much of the narrative as possible in this analysis. Therefore, a large excerpt from the interview is included below due to its exceptionally profound and informative nature. His story resonates with me because of what he lived through, and the difficult struggles and severe adversity he has fought to overcome in his life. I can empathize with and relate to the moral dissonance he has battled against for the past forty years, trying to make sense out of it all, along with his deep personal struggles to understand the meaning of his faith in this context. I wanted to learn how he was impacted by his combat experience, and how he is still trying to heal from the Moral Injury he incurred almost forty years ago.

Kirk was a Navy Seal, and he was known as a special warfare operator who fought in the jungles of Southeast Asia. During Vietnam, Kirk was mostly located behind enemy lines with his unit, and his main function was to scout for enemy presence and movement, to observe enemy activity, to pursue direct contact with the enemy, and to kill as many of the enemy as possible. I asked Kirk how he would describe, or characterize, his combat experience overall, and in what ways he felt his war experience changed him as a person, during and after the war. He stated the following:

The only way I know how to answer this is by saying that it was just overwhelming. I wasn't prepared for it all, and I came to the stark reality that I may not live through this. The way it changes you is you distance yourself from people, meaning, you don't want to get too close to anybody because they might die, and you don't want to know anything about them. The problem I found after I came home was that I couldn't turn the switch and get over it like people seemed to expect me to. So, I hardened a lot when I was in combat and got to the point where I didn't care anymore and became so numb that killing

people and watching people die didn't bother me anymore because nothing mattered.⁹

I then asked Kirk to talk about how his Moral Injury and what events or experiences he felt likely caused his wounds, and how he was impacted spiritually by everything he went through. He stated:

I had a love/hate relationship with God, because if there was a God in heaven, that meant there was a devil in hell, and the only place I knew I was going was hell. Where I think my Moral Injury really came from was with how much I struggled watching others take delight in other people's suffering. It's one thing to kill somebody, but it's another thing to make sport out of it and making fun of them while they're dying...that really bothered me! My philosophy was to just kill them and do your job and get it over with. Don't kill anybody more than you have to, and certainly not any less. If I catch you raping, then I will kill you because you're not a trooper. I've never been able to understand why guys did this over there, but most were disillusioned by a lot of things, and the draft brought in a lot of guys who didn't belong in the military and were nothing but a bunch of criminals who deserved to die. I didn't feel bad for the ones that did because, as far as I'm concerned, they had it coming. I don't know how to reconcile all this for myself spiritually. It's been a work in progress my whole life since, and God and I are still working through it. I saw guys who got so tired of it all and just stood up during a fire fight because they just wanted to go home. Of course they did, but they went home in a box instead. I learned to block out most of everything in my memory because you don't want to remember anything, especially when you go into a village or school yard and there's body parts of dead children everywhere. Or the person coming after you is a young kid, and you have to do something to stop them. The bottom line about my Moral Injury is that the military prepared me for combat to kill people. They didn't train me to survive or how to be a civilian again and re-enter society. They didn't have the resources available at the time to help me deal with everything I saw and had to do over there.¹⁰

I followed up by asking Kirk if he felt the military or the Veterans Affairs provided him with adequate or helpful resources once he returned home to equip him for the

⁹ Kirk, interview by author, Palo Alto, CA, July 7, 2015.

¹⁰ Kirk, interview.

long road of recovery and healing he would need to help him transition back into civilian life. He stated:

Nobody did a thing to help me because there was nothing. There weren't any post-deployment resources for guys like me to plug into and I didn't know what survivor's guilt or PTSD was at the time. When I came home, I didn't know what was happening to me. I had terrible nightmares and started shaking out of control to the point where I couldn't stop it. I was damaged goods and an empty shell inside. I lived a highly destructive lifestyle and put everything into a box and denied it existed for years...I had to! I stuffed it all down, and nobody was interested, and nobody cared to listen. I didn't know where to go to get help, and the last place you wanted to go at the time was the VA. I didn't want anything to do with the government or the military. My dreams intensified, and I had really bad daytime flashbacks. I contemplated suicide several times and became a drug and alcohol addict. When I was in Vietnam, they sent me to a psych ward in Japan, and the doctor told me that if I wanted a medical discharge, he would give me one, but that I probably wouldn't like it. He went onto say that people die and to suck it up and get over it. They sent me back over, and I was right back in the jungle killing people the next day. All they did was give me a bunch of pills. There was no counseling offered, and we saw the chaplain for thirty minutes out of the two years I spent over there, and all I remember him saying to us was that killing people back home would be wrong. When you came home, you were out and that was it, there was not follow up or appointments for me to go to.

My next question addressed what he found most and least helpful in his effort to try to heal, to recover, and to process his injury. He stated:

I did counseling for three years because I knew there was no getting past it. I learned that the first thing I had to do was to start talking about it because it's better if you can get it all out. I found that most people don't care and don't want to hear about it. Along the way, I found Jesus Christ, and I discovered that even he couldn't take it all away. What helped was reaching out to others who might be hurting the same way I was. I knew what my triggers were, and they were everything from sounds, smells, light, airplanes or helicopters flying overhead. Just going to sleep triggered everything for me, and my imagination just made it all worse. My father survived seven invasions during World War Two, and I asked him when the nightmares stopped and he told me when they did he would tell me. I learned that just talking with other vets from other wars helped. The hardest thing for me to overcome in my recovery process was finding something that mattered. When you're in combat, you know that you are going to die, but you're going to make it expensive for the guys who kill

you. I have had anxiety attacks my whole life. I have had to come to terms with my civilian mortality, as well as my combat mortality. Death is going to come, and I learned to have peace with knowing that my life was in God's hands. People don't realize the physical affect all this has on a person. It gives you heart problems and high blood pressure, and all kinds of other ailments. It isn't just the PTSD and Moral Injury that I have had to deal with most of my life, but the physical toll as well. I stayed drunk for two years, and you have to know that isn't good on your body.¹¹

I followed up with another question about what has helped him to cope with his wounds and enabled him to move forward in his life. He stated:

Having a child changed everything for me and really caused me to turn a corner in my life. The best coping skill is to discover who you are today, and to start liking yourself again. You can't bring the dead back to life...nothing you can do about it. You were allowed to come home, and others weren't; and I learned that you don't have to live for the ones who didn't come home. I found that you still have a responsibility to live for yourself, so I discovered that being there for other people gave me a new purpose, and they didn't have to be veterans like myself. I learned that all I had to do to help someone was to listen, to try to push them in the right direction, and to be of service to them. I also have found Facebook to be helpful because it has put me in touch with people I served with...other like-minded people.¹²

I hope that having shared the greater part of my interview with Kirk leaves the reader feeling more informed and aware of what MI is. In addition, I hope it has provided a broader perspective about the nature of the injury and how someone like Kirk has been trying to heal from it. Furthermore, I want the reader to consider Kirk as someone who is one of the faces of MI, whose life has not only been profoundly impacted by it, but who, in his recovery process, has intersected the pathways of healing that have helped him to deal with his injury in a way that has enabled him to

¹¹ Kirk, interview.

¹² Kirk, interview.

move forward in his life. God is Kirk's source of strength and resiliency, and the rock that has anchored him during the most turbulent times in his life.

Herm

Herm Kaiser is a retired Army chaplain who served during the Vietnam War. This interview provided another lens to examine Moral Injury, through the perspective of someone who is a part of a community of caregivers who are activists not only researching this issue, but who are advocates for veterans. This interview delivered what I was hoping to find all along in my research of seeing where and how the Christian community is engaging this issue, and what progress is being made on it. Herm was able to collaborate not only my research findings on MI, but he also added a piece to my research I had not explored until I met him. He shared how many segments of the Christian community are now participating in an effort to promote awareness and information about MI. In addition, because of the work that he has done, other communities of faith have come forward and expressed interest in participating in the effort to expand awareness about MI among their respective scopes of influence as well. The interview gave me a tangible sense that MI is indeed emerging within the communities of faith across our country, and that people of faith, particularly Christians, are catching on to the vision that has been created to help veterans and to facilitate healing, recovery, and renewal in their lives.

Herm is a victim of both PTSD and Moral Injury, incurred from his deployment to Vietnam. He shared that he did not really become aware of his PTSD and MI until he got

out of the Army in 2002. He cited that the reason he did not realize he had these conditions was because, while he was in the Army, he always had other people he could talk to who had gone through similar experiences. However, once he got out of the service, he lost that network of support and discovered there was no one he could talk to anymore. This is when he began to realize that he had been dealing with PTSD and MI all along, but did not know it.

Shortly after leaving the Army, Herm served as the director of chaplain ministry in his church. Getting directly involved in supporting soldiers who were deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan, and seeing them come home wounded and broken, caused him to see his own injury more clearly, and he wanted to do more to help not only himself, but others as well who were struggling with this. He stated that another way he became more aware about MI was through a DVD that was released called "Soldiers of Conscience." It discussed what might be done to reach religious communities and bring national attention to the questions of moral and religious conscience facing service members and veterans. One of the most significant things Herm mentioned during our interview is as follows

Something I found in Vietnam that enabled me to minister to the Soldiers and which in turn actually ministered to me as well was presenting the idea that God participates with us in a world of suffering and pain. This helped me to shape my perspective about what I was there to in spite of the fact that I opposed the reasons for why we were there.¹³

¹³ Herm, interview by author, Palo Alto, CA, June 9, 2015.

Herm's passion about MI led him to contact the author of the video and to ask how he could get involved to help advocate. His continued involvement and growing web of contacts led him to what seemed to be a chance meeting with Rita Brock and Gabriella Lettini who were on the west coast trying to put together what they were calling TCCW (Truth Commission on Conscience in War). At that time, they were looking for an experienced military person who could advise them. They originally sought out two former commandants of West Point, who referred them to Herm.

As a result, Herm, Rita, and Gabriella formed a partnership in 2009 that would become what is now known as the Soul Repair Institute, located at Brite Divinity School, in Ft Worth, Texas, established in 2012. All this was made possible through a network of people who knew other people who had like-minded interests in studying, understanding, and building a research network that would focus its efforts on helping veterans who suffered from MI. I discovered the Soul Repair Institute through my interview with Herm, and subsequently, I read the book authored by Rita and Gabriella. When I saw the Soul Repair website, it had everything I have envisioned before knowing it even existed. The Soul Repair Institute advocates and supports communities of faith and networking agencies that are designed to support veterans who want help to heal and recover from their wounds. Therefore, I am indebted to Herm and the chance meeting I was able to have with him. It was made possible through the now retired former Navy Deputy Chief of Chaplains, Alan "Blues" Baker, to whom I reached out during the inception of this project for recommendations of whom I could talk to about this issue. Looking back, I feel very fortunate and blessed to have been able to come into

contact with Herm, whose contribution into our interview has made my research much richer than I ever envisioned when I began the project.

Debbie

I met Debbie at Ft Carson, Colorado, in 2008, when she was involved in supporting the unit to which I was assigned. The Warrior Transition Unit supports Soldiers suffering with PTSD, TBI (severe head injury which can result in various mental and psychosocial functions), and other war-related injuries. Debbie started a non-profit charity organization called AMF (American Military Family), which is based out of Colorado. The mission of AMF is:

American Military Family provides emergency financial assistance, mental health intervention and therapy, and peer support to United States Military Veterans, Troops and their Families who are battling the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress and Traumatic Brain Injury in order to inspire, empower and improve the quality of life of those Veterans who answered their nation's call.¹⁴

Debbie said that the bulk of her work at the charity focuses exclusively on supporting OIF (Operation Iraqi Freedom) and OEF (Operation Enduring Freedom) veterans, along with Gold Star mothers (mothers whose sons or daughters have been killed in action in Iraq or Afghanistan).

When she started this organization, it was in response to her own experience with her brother, a Vietnam veteran who has struggled with severe PTSD and MI since coming home from the war. Seeing how the war affected her brother inspired her to

¹⁴ "Our Mission," AMF, accessed June 1, 2015, http://www.amf100.org/Our_Mission.html.

find a way to reach out to other people like him, and to find tangible ways to support them as they work through their recovery and healing process. She spent the first four years working with Gold Star mothers, and that inspired her to help even more people. Debbie's partnership with my unit served as a link between her organization and the soldiers who were transitioning out of the Army, to help connect them to other veterans on the civilian side who were licensed therapists offering continued support to them beyond the purview of the Army.

When I approached Debbie about doing an interview for my project, she began her own research on it. When the day came for us to do the interview, she prefaced our conversation by telling me that when I had contacted her about doing this interview, she had discovered that MI was the missing link and the connection that had finally helped her better understand what was truly bothering her brother. While she knew about his PTSD, she said she always questioned if there was something more to it. She told me that the patterns she saw in her brother - the guilt, frustration, anger, resentment and giving up on God - followed a pattern that she now understands to be MI.

Debbie's assessment of MI correlates directly with how she views the way her brother and many OIF and OEF veterans who have come to her for help, but who have chosen not to deal with their issues, in spite of the great efforts to help them:

If you never get your head out of the gutter long enough to smell the roses you will live your life with a Moral injury that I believe is one God wants you to rise to the occasion to overcome. It may be the greatest challenge one can face, but you can turn that guilt, the anger, suicidal tendencies, or whatever it is into things that will give you hope for a better life. At the end of the day, a person who has no faith, who has no trust, the person who succumbs is the person

who will struggle. I believe that MI is the pulse; it is the heart, the center, the lighting rod that drives the anger and resentment, the feelings of betrayal, and suicidal tendencies. We all have a moral compass, and how one allows all those thoughts resonate can kill you, overwhelm you, or provide you with empowerment to take a message of hope to others that none of this has to be your epitaph. It is all about how you are going to turn those thoughts around. Are you going to allow those destructive thoughts and feelings feed your depression, the anxiety, and the brutal pain that comes with that, or are you going to reassess how you think about it, and convert all that into a thought something that will lead to life? Everybody has a pulse, and you better find your pulse, and how you feed that pulse and therefore those thoughts encapsulate what MI is all about.¹⁵

My assessment of my interview with Debbie is that she was able to collaborate everything I have found to be true from my research and interviews with other people on this project. Her feedback to my questions provided me with insight and a deeper sense of how painful MI is to deal with, from the perspectives of the veteran and the family members who suffer. In addition, her testimony about her brother, and the many veterans she is helping now, created in my mind an even clearer conviction of how truly complex this issue is.

As a result of my interview, Debbie told me that she is now going to add Moral injury into the scope of the work she is doing at her charity to support veterans trying to cope and heal from their PTSD, TBI, and now MI. I found her testimony of faith in Christ to further collaborate that there are many people out there who care deeply, and who want to be involved in supporting these men and women who struggle with MI. It is because of people like Debbie, who trusts and believes on God for the soul repair only

¹⁵ Debbie, interview by author, Palo Alto, CA, July 21, 2015.

he can do, that I came away with a feeling of hope that, because of people like Debbie, those veterans who come to her are going to get the very best help there is because her motivation is driven by her love and passion for God, and by the burden God has given to her for these people.

Michael

Michael is a U.S. Army Family Life chaplain stationed at Ft. Jackson in South Carolina. Michael is a Christian counselor who operates from a biblical perspective in his work with his clients. His interview provided another important perspective about how to view MI from a biblical and spiritual perspective. Michael said that he first learned about Moral injury almost two years ago when many of his fellow chaplain colleagues were talking about it. He did some of his own research and started to discover that he had already been helping a lot of soldiers, and their families, with this issue; he simply was not calling it what he now knows it to be.

I came away from the interview feeling like I learned more about MI as he shared some of the successes and challenges he has faced in helping soldiers and their families. He reported that he has yet to have anyone walk out of his office, regardless of where they are spiritually. The need is usually so great, they will take whatever he can give them. In addition, he said the results have been encouraging, and he is hopeful that those who do not know Christ will be impacted by what he was able to provide them in his work with them. He has had numerous opportunities to share the gospel and to offer God as the provider who can repair their soul. From his perspective, God has used MI in

the lives of these men and women to bring them to a caregiver like him, who has been able to help some connect with God for the first time in their life.

Michael helped to collaborate the following things for me that validate what I feel is important to help caregivers understand about MI:

1. Moral injury is a violation of one's moral code and the betrayal of one's perceived values and beliefs about what is right and wrong.
2. Soul repair is possible for both the believer and non-believer; however, there is going to be a perceived difference of how each group defines what soul repair looks like to them.
3. Helping people reclaim their worth and value again is a vital step in the healing process.
4. For the Christian, reconnecting them to the concepts of redemption and salvation is key to helping them understand how God sees and views them.
5. Forgiveness and reconciliation are essential components for coming to terms and experiencing peace with themselves and with God.
6. Moral injury should not be defined as being caused only by war, but can be afflicted by other traumatic experiences, such as MST (Military Sexual Trauma) in which many current military members and veterans have experienced MI in this way.
7. Moral injury encompasses and affects the whole person. So, the treatment methods used need to take into consideration the human toll, and that work of soul repair is more than just spiritual issue in and of itself. Therefore,

holistic healing is often one of the most effective means and methods to help someone heal and recover.

8. For many, a clinical and therapeutic approach is necessary, depending on the severity of the MI.

“Jane”

My final interview was with a woman who wishes to remain anonymous, so I will call her “Jane.” This was the most fascinating interview I conducted out of the seven because of the story connected with Jane and her Moral injury. I was brought into contact with her through an acquaintance who thought her story would enrich my project due to its exceptional nature.

Jane is a native of the island of Trinidad and is the daughter of a man who was a high-ranking politician in the 1980’s. On July 27, 1990, a coup d’etat occurred in which more than a hundred members of an Islamist radical group, Jamaat-al-Muslimeen, attacked the parliament. Jane was eleven years old at the time, when her dad and uncle, along with the prime minister, were held hostage for several days, while violence and looting took over. As a result, a state of emergency was imposed on July 28th. Once the violence had ended, the Port of Spain was destroyed, resulting in the deaths of twenty-four people, along with scores of others who were injured.

Jane said she watched helplessly as the home in which she was raised was burned to the ground. She and her family were forced to leave the country for their safety, while scores of citizens were left destitute, and without food and water for

several days. It was out of this horrifying experience that Jane came to experience Moral injury, and to this day she says that she has not overcome the feelings that she feels have defined her life. In fact, the cumulative toll this event has had on Jane has led to her admission into several mental care facilities over the years in which she has been placed on three 5150 (legal mental health patient hold) so far. Jane told me that she is a non-Christian, and she considers herself to be apathetic and indifferent towards religion as a result of her MI.

I wanted to learn from Jane and her experience, and I asked her to share her perspective on MI. Jane said that she first came to understand MI while working on her Masters in Psychology theses on spiritual injury, as it relates to veterans and PTSD. She shared the following thoughts with me:

When this happened, it changed how I saw the world in a completely different light, and changed how my view of people and how they are supposed to act. Not only did I watch the home I grew up in burn to the ground, because of someone's fanatical religious beliefs, it made me see that when people try to impose their will on others, how destructive things can become as a result. I didn't call it Moral injury then, nor did I understand what it was until later on, but I lived what MI is all along. What I don't think many people understand about MI is that it has a domino effect on a person's life, which for me happened over the course of the next several days, weeks, months, and years.¹⁶

I asked Jane how this experience shaped and changed her life as a whole. She replied:

I adopted an attitude of not forgiveness, but acceptance, which helped me to move on with my life. However, I will never forgive and I don't forget, but I learned how to adapt and survive. It took me until I was 17 years old before I

¹⁶ Jane, interview by author, Palo Alto, CA, June 26, 2015.

got help for my issues because my parents chose to ignore and pretend that it never happened because they felt it would be the best way for me to get on with my life. What they didn't know about was the world I had spiraled into between when I was 14 up until 17 where I got into drugs and alcohol and promiscuity. This was my own private world that escaped into to try to deal and cope with my MI, and they knew nothing about it.¹⁷

I asked Jane to describe what has helped her to begin to heal and recover from her traumatic experience. She replied: **"Having my daughter gave me a purpose, and it caused me to change the way I lived my life. I got married, bought a home, and focused on other things. What I chose not to do, though, was to confront my issues and still just stuffed everything down."¹⁸**

I followed up by asking her about her views on God and spirituality, and if she has found comfort and healing in her life from a spiritual perspective. She replied: **"I am apathetic about God and religion. I have no problems with it, but I do abhor Islam and everything it represents. But overall, as long as religion doesn't hurt me I am fine with it, but I won't seek it out either way."¹⁹**

Lastly, I asked Jane to explain how she has attempted to heal in her life. She replied:

I believe that everyone has to find their own path, and the path for me is my own. If I were suggesting to someone how to go about healing, I would say to do what I have been doing, which is to find your own path, journal your thoughts and feelings, and take time for yourself. This is a lifetime wound for me and it will never gradually heal. I just hope it gradually gets better is all. The thing about my Moral injury is that it happened at such a pivotal time in my life

¹⁷ Jane, interview.

¹⁸ Jane, interview.

¹⁹ Jane, interview.

and it formed my conscience and way of being as a person. It formed how think and view people and how I interact with them. The road has been very rough for me at times because of this experience and I have to find a way to survive, with or without the support of others. I have learned not to depend on either.²⁰

When I reflect on Jane's story, her words, which spoke of so much hurt when I heard them, and what I suspect is using self-protection as her method of avoiding her pain, I am saddened and burdened for her. In addition, I am saddened that she does not know Christ and his healing presence. This interview collaborated many things about MI to me that are painful to process. Jane is an example of how painful one's experience can be due to the destructive actions of others. I am not sure how Jane has been able to survive the harrowing events in her early childhood, except to say that she is someone who has learned to do it on her own. When I think of MI I think of people like Jane, who suffers with her own sense of moral dissonance and inability to heal in a meaningful way in her life. The sober reminder that I came away from after doing this interview is that not everyone is going to seek God or see God as the source of healing and recovery they need in their life. Rather, some experiences push them away from God and cause them not to trust in any form of spirituality. Rather, they are suspicious and cynical about these things. It is my hope that Jane will come to a saving knowledge of, and experience with, Christ, and that she will see God and experience God for herself as the one who can heal and repair her soul that has been so badly damaged by the sins of others.

²⁰ Jane, interview.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I feel that the seven interviews I conducted informed me about MI in ways that I would never be, had I not done them. In addition, I feel very fortunate and blessed to have found the participants who contributed a wealth of knowledge and personal and professional experience on this issue. Furthermore, I feel that I accomplished above and beyond what I had envisioned with my project design. Lastly, I feel that this project provides a fresh take on what is an emerging issue that I hope, as a result, will cause others to consider Moral Injury to examine it for themselves.

I learned in my analysis from my interviews some important perspectives from the caregivers that gave me a better understanding about how those in a care position are trying to help those who suffer from MI. First, from a therapeutic standpoint MI is something that may take lifetime to process and heal from. Second, supportive listening and a non-judgmental approach is necessary to helping the patient feel safe to talk about their experience. Third, it is important for caregivers to reassure to the patient that it is okay to struggle with their sense of moral dissonance in conjunction with their treatment goal of achieving wellness and healing. Fourth, it is important for caregivers to understand that the patient may not be able to name what to them may be the unnamable. Fifth, while the differences between PTSD and MI has not been officially differentiated in most clinical circles the discussion and dialogue has begun and movement towards understanding the differences is underway amongst caregivers.

I came away with some profound conclusions from the sufferers of MI whose perspectives informed me about the realities of how MI can affect one's life. First, MI is

a deeply rooted injury that wounds the soul and scars the most sacred and inmost part of our being, worldview, and view of oneself as a result of committing acts that violated their moral code and constitution. Second, the road to recovery for those with MI is deeply personal, often lonely, and shrouded with misunderstanding and confusion. Third, the treatment of MI necessitates professional help, both spiritually and psychologically. Fourth, God is the ultimate source of healing and restoration for those who are people of faith. Fifth, without the inclusion of God in the healing process most sufferers of MI will seek out like-minded support systems that are devoid of spiritual, mental, and emotional healing. Hence, many will form friendships with other sufferers in which the relationships take on a therapeutic look without clinical guidance that can be found from the involvement of appropriate caregivers. Lastly, many who suffer with MI retreat or withdraw from relationships due to the struggle to connect with others because of the inward wounds that make trying to connect often difficult to do. Overall, I found both perspectives provided in my interviews to educate me not only about MI but the therapeutic road to recovery and how it can look, depending on the person. MI is truly a hidden wound that is very hard to nail down even in clinical circles because the level of acuity tends to vary from person to person. Meaning, there seem to be different levels of severity just like PTSD. But the essential difference between PTSD and MI is that PTSD is often treated by certain medications. MI is a direct wound upon the human soul, conscience, and core of what makes us who we are. It is not a psychological wound in and of itself. It is a wound that science cannot in and of itself treat and cure with scientific means. MI requires a treatment means and methods.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES

Laying a Foundation

When the foundation for this project was laid, and I began to think about what I wanted to say in this thesis, I explored several topics, but none hit home for me as far as capturing my passion and sense of identity with them. So, I prayerfully searched for a topic that captured who God made me to be, how he has used me in ministry, and what areas of ministry have come to define me. Moral Injury became an area that struck a chord, and I felt a natural connection to it.

Looking back on all the soldiers I encountered in my career as an Army chaplain, MI was one of the prominent themes present in those experiences. At the time, I did not call it MI, but now I realize that so many of the soldiers who came to me with their hurts could be captured by their own sense of soul injury. Looking back, I experienced a great deal of what war is about, having served in Iraq and Afghanistan, dealing with the war that came home with the soldiers I supported, and working through the war I brought home, too.

When my psychiatrist diagnosed me several months ago, stating that I suffered from chronic exposure to combat stress and trauma, I took a step back to think about what that meant for me in the present and the future. My life changed because of war, and I am no longer the person I used to be. This is why I resonate so much with some of

the stories that my participants shared with me during the interviews that were a part of this project. This is how I knew I found the topic I wanted to address in this thesis.

I wanted to create a project that could introduce, educate, promote awareness, and equip Christian caregivers about MI. The need for healing and recovery is at the heart of MI, and the means and methods to bring this about involves soul care and soul repair. So, I wanted to capture the essence of what is needed to heal this injury when I formulated my thesis statement: Moral Injury is a wounding of the soul that requires soul care and soul repair. The body of Christ is God's vessel to facilitate spiritual care to broken souls who want healing and restoration. Soul care is the application of caregiver ministry to hurting people who want to begin the healing, recovery, and restoration process. Soul repair is the work of the Holy Spirit as he performs his surgical work in the souls of the morally injured.

I set out to accomplish three primary goals with this project. The first goal was to raise knowledge and awareness in the Christian community about Moral Injury. The second goal was to invite and encourage Christian caregivers to become involved with veterans and current military members who suffer from MI. The third goal was to see this project become a voice that calls out to the Christian community abroad to journey with wounded souls as a form of outreach within their local contexts.

The vision for this project was two-fold:

1. To help veterans and current military members who suffer from MI understand that the church is a means for them to reconnect with God, or perhaps connect with God for the first time.

2. To experience healing, recovery, and restoration through the body of Christ, via the work of the Holy Spirit.

Project Findings

Most of the valuable insights came from the interviews as participants answered tough questions on what Moral injury looks like from the perspectives of the person who has it and the caregiver. The following provides what I learned about MI and how it shaped my understanding of it. First, Moral injury is a very common reality among combat veterans, and among those who have been exposed to trauma events that violated and compromised their moral code and perceived consciousness of the world around them. Jane was a prime example to show that anyone can experience MI from wounds incurred by life and the world around them. The literary research collaborated this understanding. In addition, the interviews provided further confirmation as the stories that three of the participants shared collaborated how they incurred their injuries.

Second, the interviews revealed that the concepts and pathways of how the healing process with MI occurs can differ between cultures. For example, both Ed Tick and Jonathan Shay shared in their books that in the Vietnamese culture, following the Vietnam War, researchers discovered years later a lower percentage of documented cases of PTSD. Consequently, the reporting of Moral injury amongst its veterans was also rare. The hypothesis for this discovery was linked to a belief that the soldiers who

returned from war, came home to a supportive community that engaged them in their recovery process, which facilitated healing and restoration.

In addition, soldiers reported that the reason they were able to heal and restore themselves was because they believed they were defending their homeland against the American occupier, and their cause was just and necessary in order to protect their land and their families. Hence, for the Vietnamese soldier, they fought out of a sense of national pride, duty, honor, and courage. The way in which these communities supported their veterans kept them from feeling isolated, alone, and lost in their experience. Both Shay and Tick pointed out that this method is the key to healing both PTSD and Moral injury as communities comprised of networks of family and friends support and walk with the combat veteran and give them permission to grieve and process their experience in an environment of acceptance, without judgment. I think this is profound, and it hits the nail on the head when it comes to understanding the importance of people helping their veterans heal.

Third, the interviews with the four caregivers revealed they are in agreement that soul care involves the participation of the Christian community supporting our veterans. Soul repair is the work of the Holy Spirit to perform the inner surgical healing of the soul that only he can provide. However, they stated that this view is likely shared only amongst committed evangelicals who operate from a biblical methodology. They all agreed with the example I shared with them about the profound findings gained from the Vietnamese culture as their communities embraced their veterans after the war.

They agreed there are principles at play with how we heal as human beings from traumatic events. This means that it does not matter if you are Buddhist or Christian; if you engage in a process of healing in which you are not alone, and you have the support of a community around you that provides love and acceptance, without judgment, it becomes an effective grounds for restoring a person back to wellness. For example, both Tick and Shay discussed that, in their work with Vietnam veterans, they found Buddhism to be a very common attraction amongst them. They attributed this mainly to disillusionment with American society and its western views of medicine, spirituality, and methods of healing, which are too pharmaceutically based, and devoid of an effort to achieve inner healing. From the perspective of many veterans, Protestantism and Catholicism have failed to provide the means of healing resources for which they have searched. So, the perception of many is that the church in America is simply an impersonal institution similar to the government they now despise, devoid of the peace from the inner anguish within the soul that deeply bothers them. Therefore, in an attempt to escape from what they view as systems and institutions that have oppressed and betrayed them, many veterans have moved away from the United States and gone to Southeast Asia in order to connect with a culture and spirituality they have adopted and which now defines them.

Additional observations include:

- Each interview participant agreed that more awareness and education about Moral injury is necessary.

- Each caregiver concurred that the Christian community does not seem prepared or equipped to work with veterans who suffer from MI. This may be due to the level of acuity, and that the church is not primarily designed to address this.
- All four caregivers believe that MI is primarily a spiritual matter. However, they also feel that it is a matter that needs clinical attention within the mental health field, operating with a Christ-centered model.
- All four caregivers agreed that PTSD overshadows MI because it is widely known and has received much more extensive research.
- All four caregivers agreed that the concept of community is very important to helping veterans who suffer from MI. Without a support system, it is difficult to envision how someone with MI can overcome their injuries.
- All interviewees concurred that soul care and soul repair are symbiotic necessities, but that each individual has to decide which path is right for them to engage the care and repair needed in his life.
- All three non-caregiver participants agreed that they are skeptical of what role medical science should play with Moral injury. The reason is that they have seen medicine default too much on pharmaceuticals as the primary pathway to healing, and they believe that the nature of their wounds cannot be healed by modern science.

Additional Findings

The interviews revealed mixed results in validating if the Christian community provides a legitimate environment to help those who suffer from MI. Two out of seven participants did not indicate any interest in the church, much less any form of spirituality. In addition, they did not seem to view any of it as an option they would explore for help. Only one combat veteran participant indicated that God and the church have been helpful to their recovery. However, all four caregiver participants validated and identified the church as an essential means to support the healing process. This caregiver response was not surprising. Still, it was disappointing to note that those who indicated they suffer from MI do not see God as someone they are seeking for help, at this time.

Moral dissonance was one of the key themes that came out of the interviews with Kirk and Jane. This condition lies at the heart of Moral injury. It became clear through the interviews with Kirk and Jane that both have suffered from this, and they still struggle with it years removed from the events that caused their MI. For Kirk, moral dissonance seemed to be centered on his feelings of being overwhelmed by his combat experience, and that he was unable to reconcile his conscience with what he experienced as a warfare operator. I cannot imagine the deep inner struggle he must have had as he was forced to make life and death decisions with people's lives, with little to no time at all to decide either way. When I stop to think about this, it is hard to imagine how one's conscience would not be wounded from having to decide whether to kill or not to kill, at the peril of their own life being at stake, based on whether they

made the right or wrong decision. There is no training or manual in life that can prepare anyone for this; yet, Kirk was thrust into a reality in which he had no choice but to decide one way or the other because his own life depended on it. Therefore, there is no doubt whatsoever in my mind, and especially from my own combat experience, that the weight of these ethical and moral dilemmas haunts and torments the souls of combat veterans. Kirk was repeatedly forced to make impossible decisions in impossible situations, and the hardest part of it all is that guys like him have to live with the decisions they made for the rest of their lives. Those decisions will undoubtedly shape the rest of their lives. It goes without saying, Kirk has struggled deeply to cope with decisions he made in combat, and the moral dissonance he continues to experience is a reality that has shaped his life since the day he left Vietnam to return home.

Through the interview with Kirk, I found that his story, and the journey he has made with God through his healing and recovery process, is one in which soul care and soul repair is an ongoing reality he has embraced. So, the implications of the thesis statement are consistent with Kirk's story, and the direction God has taken him to repair and restore his soul. Whether Kirk will ever truly heal from his Moral injury is a question for which I do not think anyone can know the answer. This is why it is so important to understand that this is an injury that medical science cannot necessarily wrap its hands around from an empirical perspective. Moral injury is a wound of the soul, and while medications and therapeutic applications may help to facilitate the healing process to a degree, the true nature of healing occurs through the Holy Spirit in ways only he can perform. Kirk told me that this was the conclusion he came to, and he had learned

through his walk with Christ that the only way he was going to heal, and to salvage his quality of life, was to allow God to work in his soul to perform the required surgery.

Jane seemed to be disconnected from her spirituality, and the nature of her wound centered on her feelings of violation by radical Islamist terrorists. However, to Jane, everything seemed relative to her in the sense that she seems to blame God for her experience, and her moral dissonance has been her reality since. Jane does not seem to want help from anyone who represents religion, and her path of healing seems to be one of acceptance and apathy, instead of engaging the root cause of her injury. Jane experienced a traumatic wounding of her conscience, and her moral code was seriously damaged by what she experienced. Sadly, at this time, I do not see Jane accepting or reaching out to any community of faith for support with her MI.

Among the caregivers I interviewed, Jeff, Herm, and Michael were very helpful with their contributions to the research. An assessment of the findings revealed a collaboration of the key factors that exist with Moral injury. Jeff was able to articulate and break down what MI is, and how caregivers should help veterans who have it. I came away with a clearer understanding of how MI plays out for both the veteran and the caregiver assigned to help.

The consistent bottom line with each interview is that MI is a very complicated issue from philosophical and spiritual point of views. It can look different for each person that a caregiver engages. In addition, how one interacts with their spirituality can widely differ. Furthermore, how one chooses to heal, and what means and methods are used, can widely differ. So, like any physical injury one incurs, how a person deals

with the recovery and healing process can look different from one person to the next.

While one person may have a strong coping system, another may not. While one individual may lean on his faith to sustain him, another may abandon his faith.

These are some of the conclusions gained from the interviews with Jeff, Herm, and Michael. Each caregiver came from a Christian worldview, and each understands the value of the gospel and the role of God as essential to how one recovers from MI. Yet, Jane represents those who may never accept help from such caregivers because she sees her wounds as having occurred within the realm of religion, motivated by radical religious fanaticism, and the zealot religious figures themselves serving as the perpetrator of her MI, resulting in her becoming the victim. Organized religion betrayed her trust, and therefore, she has taught herself not to trust those who represent communities of faith. On the other, while I saw Kirk as someone who could say he had every reason to abandon God and spirituality as a means to help him heal, he actually recognized God as essential to his recovery and healing.

Jose has found his own support network among his Army buddies with whom he stays in regular contact. They participate together in regular retreats and outings that give them opportunities to share and process their combat experiences. Shay and Tick endorse such methods; however, Tick would infuse eastern spiritual practices into his work with them if they were to ever come together. Jose did not present spirituality as something in which he is interested or focused in his life currently, nor does he view it as a priority for helping him heal. Rather, he seems to view his network of friends as his support system that functions much like an exclusive tribal system in which no one else

is allowed to enter, and which no one goes beyond for help. In essence, it seems as though Jose has found a community where he has found his identity with those he feels understands him and who suffered the same experiences he did. The tribe is his sanctuary, comfort zone, and place of safety, away from the rest of the world that neither understands nor cares about what he and his friends went through. This tribe is an exclusive community that stays off the grid and away from conventional and non-conventional means to heal. They are one another's means of healing.

The interview with Debbie proved to be very helpful in terms of explaining her perspective of how MI can impact the lives of those it wounds. As a result of this interview, I concluded that advocacy is an important tool to help connect veterans with the resources they need to start working through things. Debbie offers counseling resources and group work in which veterans connect with other veterans to journey together to start the hard work of introspective healing. Debbie's charity is not the church, nor is her charity even a Christian organization as such. Still, she is able to infuse her faith with those she helps to serve as a spring board that perhaps will ignite interest in considering how God is essential to the healing process. Debbie connected and collaborated the concepts of soul care and soul repair as being the means and methods to help veterans heal from MI.

As I assess this aspect of my research, I wish there were many more Debbie's and charities like hers across the country because, for so many veterans, the church simply is not the first place they will turn to for help. Sometimes, veterans find their way to the church through a less direct pathway. We have to remember, their soul has been

wounded, and many have concluded that God is ultimately to blame for it. How we draw some of these folks into the Christian community can be a long process that requires a great deal of patience. I am reminded that God is a very patient and merciful God who understands and cares, and who is willing to wait as long as necessary, not forcing himself on those who are not ready for him, yet. This is the heart of the gospel that, while someone like myself and many others know who and what the answer is, we have to allow the Holy Spirit to perform his work in the hearts of people to prepare them for what he wants to offer to them.

Recommendations for Further Study

If there was something else that I would have looked at more in-depth as part of my research, it would have been to examine Moral injury from a cross-cultural perspective in order to better understand how other people and communities in various parts of the world view this issue. In addition, I want to see how issues like PTSD and MI compare across cross-cultural boundaries, and what treatment methods are being used. Then, I would like to compare those results with what is happening in the United States. It is my belief that Moral injury is an emerging issue, and it is becoming more widely known and understood within the clinical realm of professional chaplaincy, and perhaps, other religious circles. However, I am not convinced it is known nearly as well within the mental health community in the United States. Therefore, I recommend further study to examine this more closely by including a mental health specialist as part of the interviews. While I provided the literary perspectives of two secular psychiatrists

(Jonathan Shay and Ed Tick) who have worked extensively with combat veterans on issues like PTSD and MI, I think establishing personal contact with a professional in the mental health field can provide greater insight and a pulse of how an issue like MI is currently viewed within that community.

Another recommendation is to examine Moral injury from a broader religious perspective by interviewing select participants who represent other faith traditions in order to learn how they view soul care and soul repair, and how they see those dynamics playing out within the realm of their theological worldview and practice. This can be helpful to provide a comparative analysis showing how and why approaching an issue like Moral injury with a biblical foundation is key to helping a combat veteran connect or reconnect with God through the persons of the Trinity.

My fear is that if veterans do not feel that their church cares or understands an issue like MI, they are more likely to feel isolated and alone in their struggle. In these cases, they probably will not stick around very long for someone to finally figure out their need. This is a complex issue, and I do not want to sound hard on the church because this is something that is not going to be healed on Sunday mornings. Rather, it requires a holistic approach by caregivers who have the skill sets and gifts to be able to walk alongside veterans who are hurting and who need more than a word of encouragement from their pastor. They need a way to grieve and to release the anger and hurt out of their system as they deal with their moral dissonance in a way that helps them to start healing. It is unlikely this will take place during a Wednesday night Bible

study; rather, it will occur in venues outside the church building, yet still supported by caring Christians who want to be involved.

A third recommendation is to interview a select panel of pastors and Christian counselors in order to gain a broader sample of what these professional ministers know about MI, and to understand how they feel this issue should be approached from a biblical and theological point of view. Not many in the Christian community have heard about Moral injury, and many may even misconstrue what it is, possibly confusing it with PTSD. This misidentification even occurs outside Christian circles. Much more awareness is needed in the church, but beyond that, it is just as important how the church goes about helping those who suffer with MI.

A fourth recommendation for further study on Moral injury is to interview a larger group of combat veterans to try to get more insight and content. I spoke with four combat veterans, two of whom are caregivers, and the insights they offered gave this project the substance it needed to help show why MI is an emerging issue. Because they all offered a similar narrative in response to the questions, I did not believe it necessary to interview more. However, if I were to do it over again, I would have formatted a different panel of questions in order to examine MI from other angles and points of view, Christian and non-Christian.

When I assess the outcomes of my project design and the execution of my project with respect to my interviews and literary research, I feel that I came away with a much better understanding of how something like Moral injury can impact people's lives; and, it can look completely different for each person. With respect to the biblical

and theological foundation presented in this project, I hold true to my conviction that God is the source of healing, recovery, restoration, hope, and grace needed for the healing process. While I would say that soul care and soul repair is something that can be attempted by any other faith community, and although wellness can be achieved within other respective spiritual traditions, apart from Christ, I cannot see how true spiritual restoration and wholeness can be accomplished. I firmly believe that soul care is the role of a skilled caregiver who is connected to Christ in such a way that he is able to direct and facilitate a healing journey, led by the person of the Holy Spirit as he performs soul repair in the deep recesses of the morally injured.

As I evaluate the outcomes of this project with respect to my biblical and theological foundations, in conjunction with the other aspects of the literary research and interviews conducted, I found that soul care and soul repair are the essential methods to treating and healing Moral Injury. They are the essential methods because the very nature of MI is spiritual in its composition. In addition, soul care involves people helping people, from a biblical perspective and methodology.

Furthermore, the most important aspect of soul care is prayer, because prayer is the obvious reality of knowing that there is no humanly way to heal this kind of injury apart from God's direct intervention. Prayer is the essential method of ushering in soul repair, whereby we invite the person of the Holy Spirit to perform his precision work of surgery on those broken and damaged places that lay deep within the soul.

Unfortunately, none of the literary resources I found on Moral injury presented the Holy Spirit as the key agent to healing this condition. However, I saw clearly within my

research of the Scripture of seeing the hand of God at work through the Holy Spirit to facilitate healing, recovery, and restoration in the lives of those who are broken and wounded.

Sadly, not every one of my interview participants has a relationship with Christ or identifies him as the healer for his soul. Still, I am glad I interviewed them because they helped to confirm the reality that many suffer with MI apart from Christ, and they are searching for meaning and healing without seeking the only one who can truly heal and bind up their wounds. It is ironic that the very nature of their injury is spiritual, but how one goes about seeking to heal does not necessarily mean he is going to seek God to help him. Rather, for some, God and organized religion are who they blame for their injuries in the first place, and the last place they will go to find healing.

Conclusion

I feel that I have now come full circle with the completion of this project as it relates to my own combat experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. This paper was already written within my own life experience as I look back over the past several years in the Army. I never envisioned that I would write about a topic that captures much of what my combat experience was like...ministering to wounded souls afflicted by the traumas of war.

I, too, was afflicted by what I saw and experienced as a caregiver as I watched one soldier after another come into a trauma room, wounded by the weapons of war, but even deeper than that, wounded in their souls by what they saw and experienced.

There are some things in life that never leave your memory, and they become a part of the fabric of your journey and experience. War became part of my fabric and experience, and it lives with me, to this day. Moral injury is a reality that has become part of my own experience that has caused me to see the world in a different way. I struggle with my own battles that I trust God to give me the victory over. For those of us who have seen war, the wake of its destruction, and the lives it takes, it is hard to find words to describe how it feels. It is simply too overwhelming to try to absorb the toll it took on me, which is something that still affects me today.

Being able to learn and talk about what Moral injury is, through the lenses of Scripture, the eyes of other combat veterans, and other caregivers, has given me the ability to put this issue in a place for myself that provides me relief. I have looked forward to the completion of this project because part of my healing journey going forward is to move on, and to focus on the next stages of my life. I have a wife and young daughter who want all of me in their life, and that is what I intend to give them. My combat experiences will always be a part of me, but what I will not allow is for them to stop me from living, because healing is learning how to live in spite of that which injured you. I am grateful for all who contributed to this project and made it possible for me to reach the end. I am eternally grateful to my God and Savior who is forever faithful and by whose grace I continue to stand, and in whom I live and move and have my being. To him be the glory and the honor!

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